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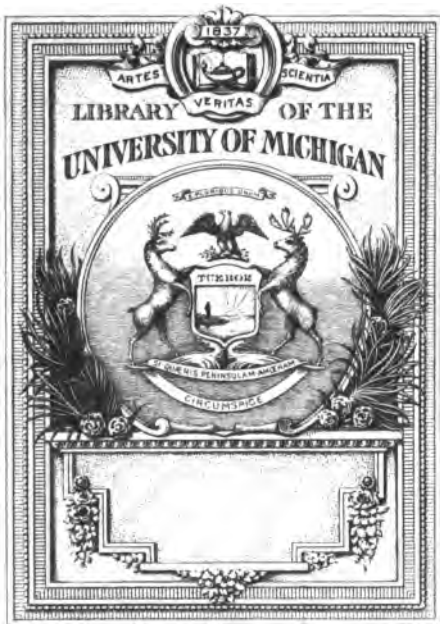
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“SHE DID HER BEST FOR THE YOUNG COMPOSER.”



WHEN I LIVED IN BOHEMIA

*Papers selected from the portfolio of
Peter —, Esq.*

BY
FERGUS HUME

AUTHOR OF

"THE ISLAND OF FANTASY," "THE MAN WHO VANISHED,"
"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY CYRIL R. HALLWARD

"ET EGO IN BOHEMIA FUI"



NEW YORK
TAIT, SONS & COMPANY
UNION SQUARE



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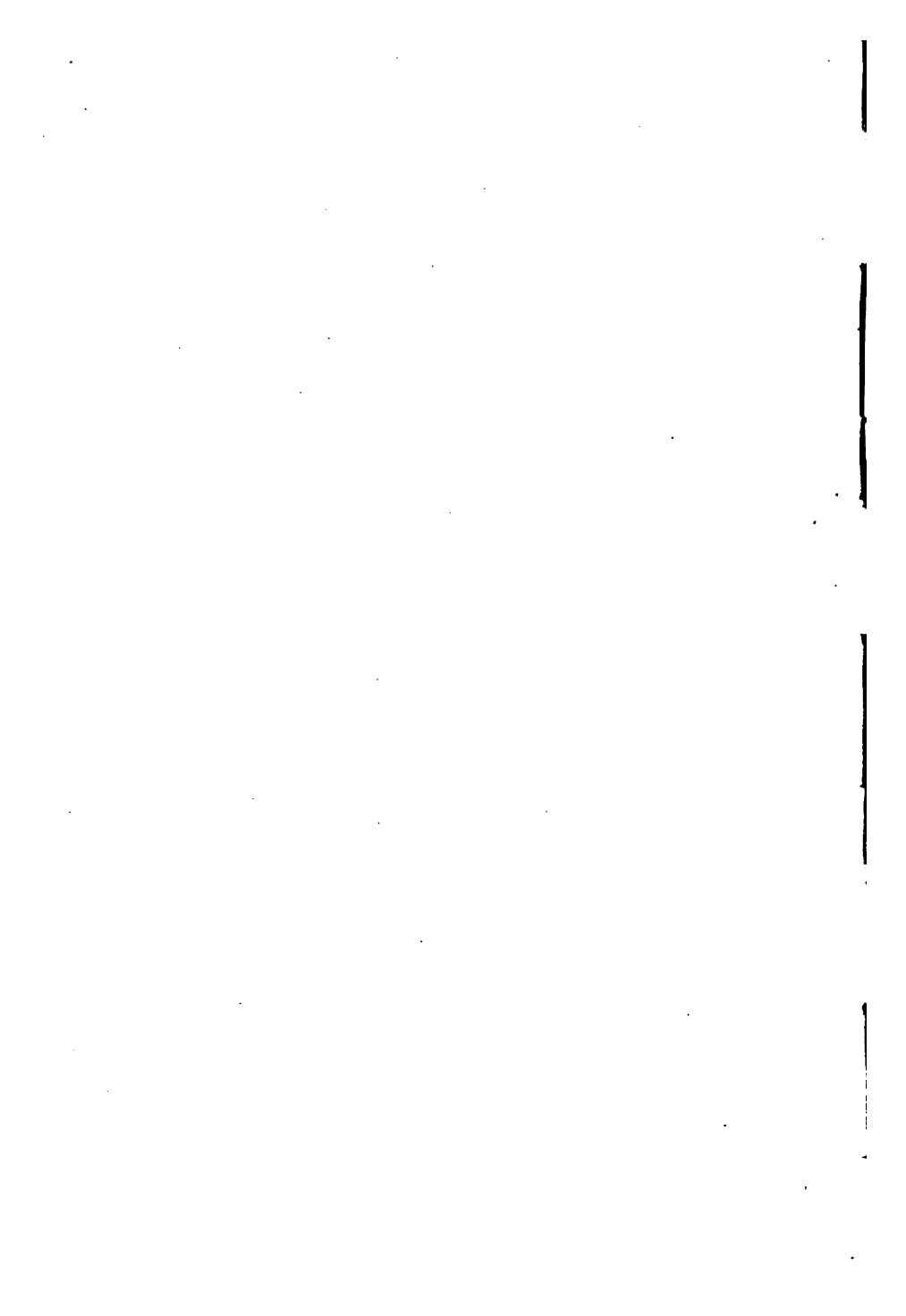
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To the Late

MORTIMER COLLINS,

POET, NOVELIST, ESSAYIST.

To thee, alas! long laid in earth,
I bring these tales of tears and mirth,
In token of the worship true
I have for one I never knew.
When thou wert by the silver Thames,
I rambled where New Zealand gems
Pacific waves with islands three;
And there thy tales were dear to me,
But dearer still thy minstrelsy.
Thus dwelling in such distant land,
I saw thee not, nor clasped thine hand,
Else had thy magic singing drawn
My feet to that delightful lawn
Where, happy with a happy wife,
You lived a true Horatian life,
And, steeped in love of bird and flower,
Laughed at the follies of the hour.
Alas! for such, some cruel fate
Made me come hither all too late;
Yet, now that I have crossed the wave,
I lay this tribute on thy grave,
From one who mourned thy broken span
And loved the poet and the man.



AN INTRODUCTORY DRAMA.

SCENE.—*A study—shaded lamp—comfortable fire—plentitude of books.*

TIME.—*Midnight—December.*

SITUATION.—*Author discovered reading “Real Ghost Stories,” and smoking a final pipe before retiring to rest.*

STAGE DIRECTIONS.—*Under the uncanny influence of psychic stories, Author glances uneasily into the dark corners of the room. Clock strikes twelve times, and to dismay of Author the ghost of the late Henri Murger materializes in the opposite chair.*

AUTHOR (*alarmed*).—The devil!

GHOST (*annoyed*).—By no means, monsieur. A poor, harmless shadow of what was once a badly-paid literary man.

AUTHOR.—Henry Murger!

GHOST (*complacently*).—Ah! you know me, then. This is indeed posthumous fame.

AUTHOR.—I have seen your portrait.

GHOST.—Good! And my book treating of the Latin Quarter also. I make you my compliments on your shameless imitation of the sar

AUTHOR (*indignantly*).—I perceive Frenchman are less polite in the spirit than in the flesh! You accuse me of plagiarism?

GHOST.—Of the idea only. As to the rest, your London Bohemians are but pale reflections of my dear Schaunard and Co.

AUTHOR (*hesitating*).—They were hardly respectable.

GHOST (*shrugging its shadowy shoulders*).—Eh! what would you? Respectability means money, and my quartette were poor.

AUTHOR.—Well, at least, the ladies——

GHOST (*warmly*).—Holy blue! Say nothing against those charming immoralities! To be beautiful is better than to be good.

AUTHOR (*dryly*).—I see, things go by contraries in France—even proverbs. As regards your book, monsieur, 'tis true I stole from you the men, but I left you the ladies.

GHOST.—Which could be but ill spared. Their absence has left your book respectable—and dull.

AUTHOR (*uneasily*).—I trust not. After all, the English public would have blushed at the vagaries of Mademoiselle Mimi. For myself, I love your charming grisettes; but the Young Person, M. Murger, the Young Person!

GHOST.—Unpleasant Young Person! With us she does not exist, save in conventual seclusion, where she reads her Breviary. Oh! I understand your limitations, M. Tartuffe. England is bounded on all sides by morality, and you are afraid of Madame Grundy; but I notice you are not afraid of your critics.

AUTHOR.—Oh! but I am, desperately. They are Kings of the Press.

GHOST.—Who can do no wrong.

AUTHOR.—I have already discussed that question in my book.

GHOST (*chuckling*).—You will be hoisted on your own petard.

AUTHOR.—I perceive you have met with Shakespeare, and he has been quoting from one of his plays. But, my dear monsieur, as regards your objection, if my Bohemians at times are severe on critics, publishers, and the powers that be, they speak the truth from their point of view.

GHOST.—Which is the author's point of view.

AUTHOR.—By no means. If I drew all my characters from myself, and made them speak as I, their creator, why then you would have but a dozen or so duplicates of one personality, which, artistically speaking, would be wrong. I do not approve of many things they say; but one can hardly make struggle-for-lifers talk like rich men, or speak nothing but good of those whom—however unjustly—they regard as their natural enemies.

GHOST.—True! I also have defended myself in the same way; but to no purpose. Besides, the truth is always unpleasant.

AUTHOR.—And literature is an unremunerative profession.

GHOST.—I am with you there heartily. Still, though born poor, I died in the purple.

AUTHOR.—A grave jest!

GHOST.—Naturally. You cannot expect those in-

timately connected with the grave to be merry. Nevertheless, I am merry—in moderation.

AUTHOR.—And at what?

GHOST.—At the idea of your mistaking squibs for cannon-balls.

AUTHOR.—Certainly I have not your genius, nor had I your opportunity to observe the seamy side of literary life. Paris is not London, nor has the gay Latin Quarter much affinity with our dreary Grub Street; therefore you must make allowances for my ambitious squibs. As regards the sentiments of my characters, they are not mine, for I am scarcely so pessimistic as Peter, Aaron, Rax, and Eugene. I trust the public will see things in this light, as they assuredly will if they read my last chapter, which is a Brief for the Defendant.

GHOST.—You copy your characters from real life?

AUTHOR.—No! I am more magnanimous than you, and spare my friends. All my characters are fictitious.

GHOST (*crossly*).—It is just as well. In real life they would be bores!

AUTHOR (*reproachfully*).—Unkind! And I admire your book so much—

GHOST.—That you copied it. However, my book prevented me crossing the Pont des Arts; but I trust you will be more fortunate.

AUTHOR.—We have no bridge of that sort in England. If my book shows the public that I can do better work than mere detective stories, I will be more than satisfied.

GHOST.—Let us hope your readers will share that satisfaction. *Bonjour*, monsieur; for I notice it is

already to-morrow. I trust you will escape lightly; but it is dangerous to take Truth from the bottom of her well.

AUTHOR.—Ah! you think I should have left “well” alone?

GHOST.—Pardon. I cannot joke in English. You should be punished for such poor wit, as you will be by your critics.

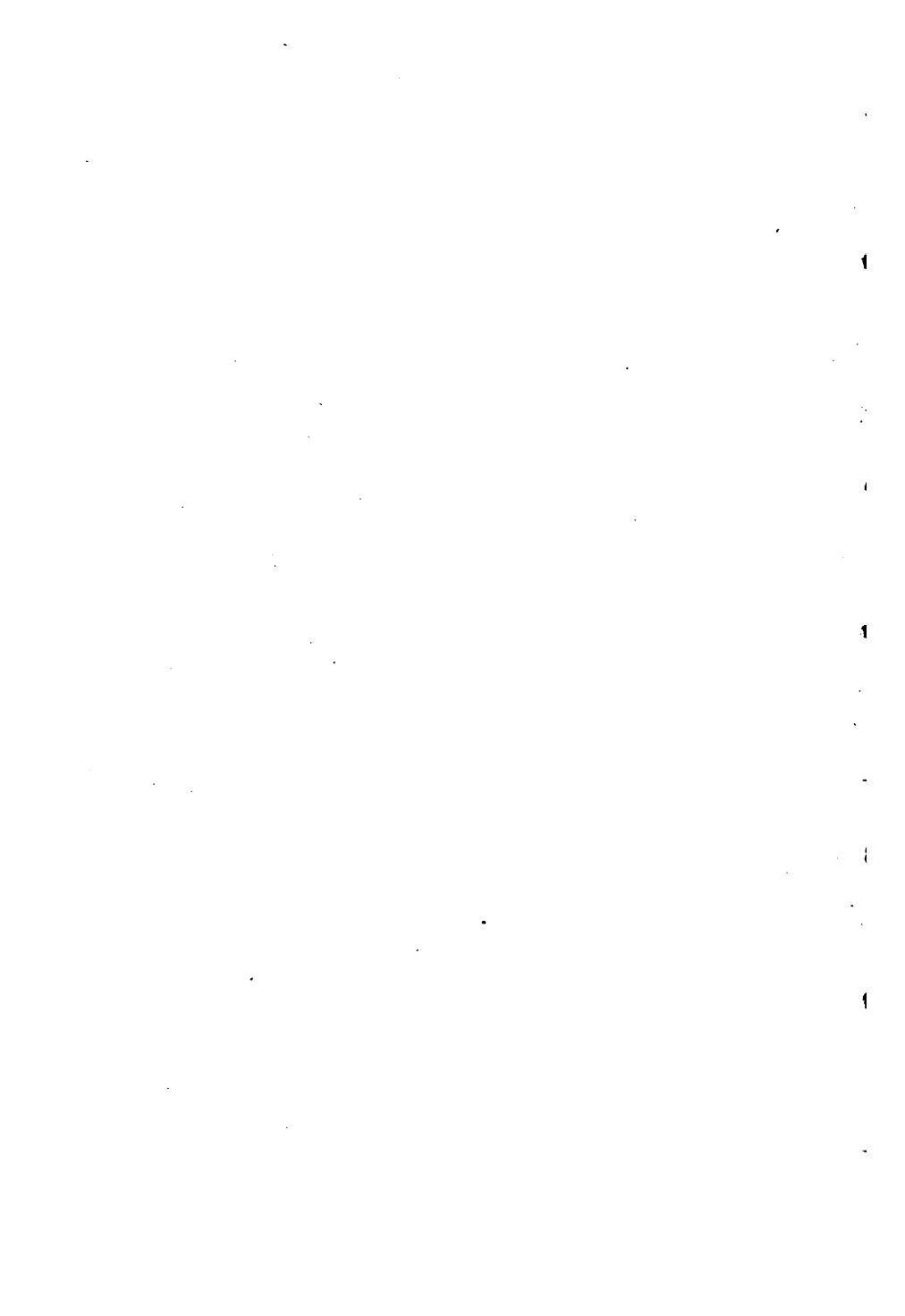
AUTHOR.—They may be less severe than you.

GHOST.—Not if I know anything of human nature. Well, I must disintegrate.

AUTHOR (*conventionally*).—So sorry! When will I see you again?

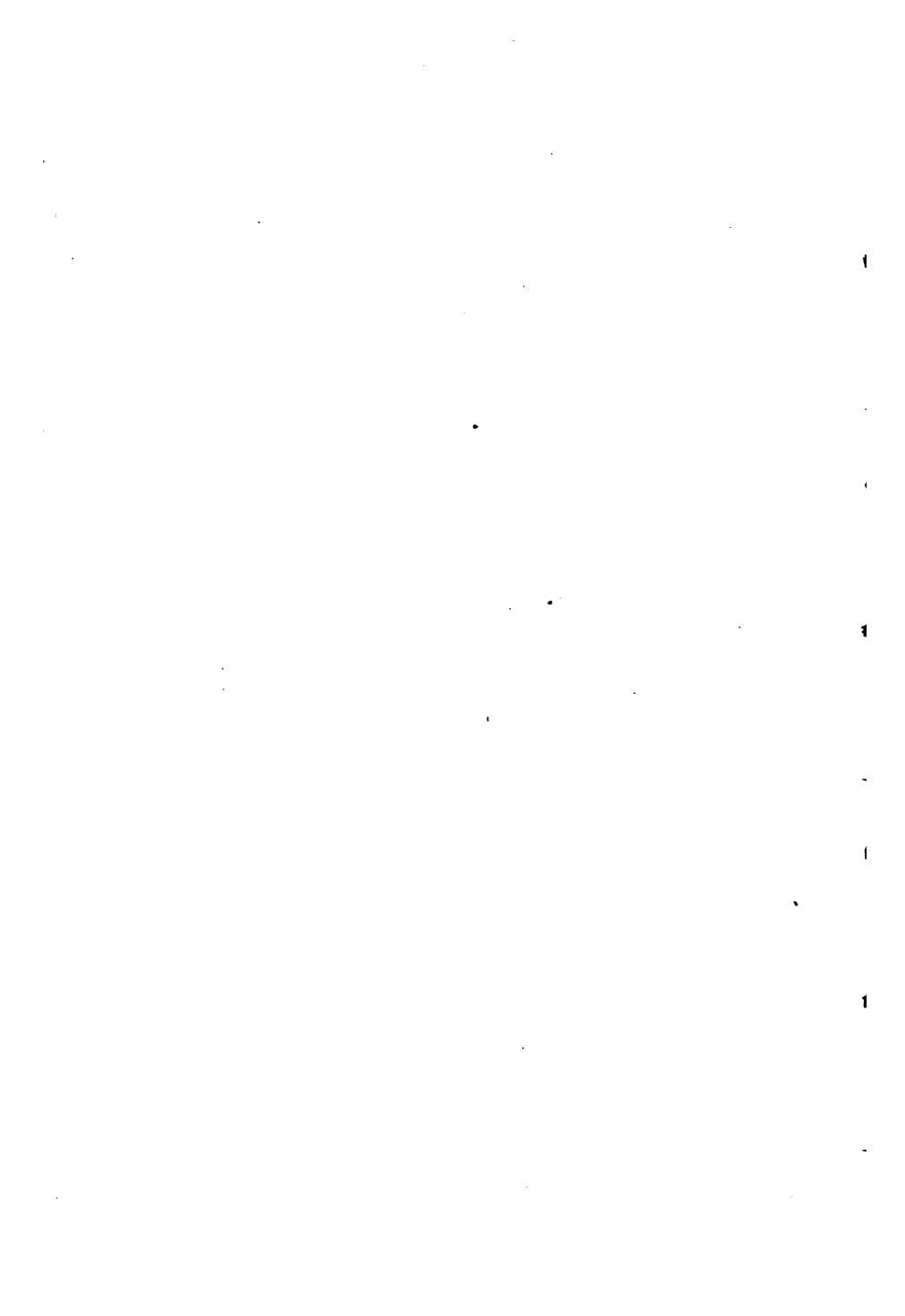
GHOST (*fading*).—When your book is a success. (*Vanishes.*)

AUTHOR (*in despair*).—I have seen him for the last time! (*Is heard sobbing, strangely like M. Maeterlinck's Waterfall.*)



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IN BOHEMIA.

Dear those days when I was younger,
Merry days of one-and-twenty ;
Then the time of dreams and hunger,
Now the years of peace and plenty.

Peace and plenty—both are pleasant,
Yet engender melancholy ;
I would barter all the present
For one hour of youthful folly.

What ! once more be pauper-martyr—
Live that life of self-denial ?
Nay, that were a foolish barter :
Easeful age for youth of trial !

Yet, ye dreams, do not forsake me :
Memory is old age's treasure ;
On your wings of lightning take me
Back to that sad life of pleasure.

Blithe Bohemia, how I love thee !
Land of dreams and soul-compellings,
Brilliant as the stars above thee
Was our life within thy dwellings.

Ah ! what visions wild, ecstatic,
In those days we all were scheming !
But the plans oft born in attic
Ended but in idle dreaming.

IN BOHEMIA.

Vile Bohemia, how I hate thee,
With thy garrets ignominious!
Myriad toilers execrate thee,
Graveyard of the starving genius!

Empty grate and attic lonely,
Barren cupbeard, well I know it;
Dreams and aspirations only
To enrich the pauper poet.

Love thee! hate thee! bizarre blending,
Enigmatic contradiction;
Changeful feelings never ending,
Mixture of real life and fiction.

Visions of to-day bright gleaming,
Vanishing on sad to-morrows;
Yet I love thee for thy dreaming,
Though I hate thee for thy sorrows.

Dreams! let me revive the glories
Of Bohemia's motley cities—
Tell the sweet and bitter stories,
Pipe the merry tearful ditties!

Mingled thoughts will follow after
When you hear these memories youthful—
Tears in some, in others laughter.
All, alas! are sadly truthful.

WHEN I LIVED IN BOHEMIA.

CHAPTER I.

HOW I DISCOVERED BOHEMIA.

SALUTATIONS to the brave-hearted comrades who dwelt with me aforetime in the merry land of Bohemia! Salutations to the dead and to the living! for many are dead, and those who still survive dwell no more in the garret-halls of Prague. Nay, not that city which shivers by the icy river in the chill Northern land, but the cosmopolitan metropolis of Brainland, which changes its nationality with every tint of the map. The city which, like Marlowe's Hell, is not circumscribed, but rises everywhere Troy-like to the sound of music, to the scratching of pens, to the sweeping of paint-brushes; in short, which takes shape, being, and local habitation wherever congregate a dozen or so of those full-brained, empty-pocketed beings who aspire to amuse, instruct, and guide the generations of men.

Aristophanic Clouduckooland, well do I know your bleak garrets, your inhospitable streets, your obdurate landladies, your fireless grates! Have I not, with desperate desire to earn a much-needed guinea, invoked the Muse, who, unattracted by her

despairing worshipper, responded not to his piteous wailing? The chimes of midnight—even those heard of Master Shallow—have rung their weird melody in mine ear; and, seated on a rush-bottomed, broken-backed chair, I have drained foaming beakers of beer—that champagne of Bohemia—to the quick realization of impossible dreams conceived in the small hours of the morning.

O my beloved brethren! how often have I seen your faces through dense clouds of the Indian weed, smiling like haggard cherubs haloed with ragged locks! How often have we discussed the ever-present subject of ways and means in a manner worthy of Rothschild, and bravely kept at bay that fierce animal who, ever roaming the hungry streets of Bohemia, howls at the doors of those with unmarketable wares, such as poets stringing stanzas of ethereal thought, painters with ideas, too original for acceptance by conservative masses, and musicians piping grotesque melodies captured at midnight in cat-serenaded antics! Have we not laughed together in mad mirth, somewhat akin to tears, and boasted of our long-extended ancestry, which reaches back to blind Homer mouthing immortal verse to scattered clans of appreciative Greeks? Now, alas! we have no Homer, but little immortal verse—of present-day manufacture; no appreciative Greeks; in fact, nothing but poverty of pocket and of invention. Dwarfs are we descendants of giants, lilting old songs to new measures, heard but half-heartedly by dull-eared audiences, who love the jingle of gold better than the jingle of rhyme.

Blithe-hearted friends! but ye are gone, so why



"THAT SAD LIFE OF PLEASURE."

apostrophize the empty air? Ye are scattered far and wide, blown divers ways into odd corners by the resistless wind of Destiny. Some now dwell in gilded halls, gimcrack oracles delivering mystic messages in still more mystic verse; others bide in far countries, either renegades of Muse-worship, or journalistic slaves grinding out literary chaff from the mill of passing events to a "Something-new" crying public. A few pipe delicate songs of Ariel-like sweetness to a weary world, careless of strains pertaining not to gains or losses; and many—ah! many slumber soundly in the bosom of Mother Earth. In crowded city graveyards, by the sandy wind-swept dunes of the seashore, in the daisy-sprinkled God's acre of quiet villages—nay, even in perilous lands beyond the pillars of Hercules, many rest dreamless in savage solitudes, awaiting the trump of doom to tell them that better is the pittance of a city clerk adding up rows of figures, than foolish scribblings of "dove" and "love," and "mountain" and "fountain," in unfurnished garrets. Fame, you bragging jade, your promised gold when gained is little better than tinsel, and your laurel crowns cure no headache of toilsome years.

Sculptor, painter, poet, singer, romancer, I knew them all in the old days when Plancus was counsel. By the foot of Pharaoh, as swears bombastic Bobadil, we were a right merry company—on the surface only however; for bitter enough were the undercurrents of many lives. Still we were like the Spartan boy, and let the fox of poverty gnaw under our garments while the smile played lightly enough on our pale lips. "*Et ego in Bohemia fui,*" but I was one

of the least of those who foregathered under the hospitable roof of Mrs. Prass—hospitable enough, poor soul, when her fluctuating income permitted. But she also is dead, and I doubt not has gone to some heaven where rents are paid regularly and the tax-collectors come not to the door, nor angel boarders—who, being immortal, devour no food—breed famine at carefully-calculated breakfast tables.

Lord, how was it that I fell into such dire straits of poverty and hardship? What malignant fairy, uninvited to my birth-feast, turned me off the pleasant path of good living down the narrow lane leading to Bohemia, and within hailing distance of hospital, morgue, and workhouse? Why was I not strangled in the early stages of rhyming? or my nurse, who, by crooning old ballads, gave me a taste for such foolishness, dismissed on the spot? Sir or madam (I am addressing my reader), you cannot alter the destiny of a man. Napoleon, emulating his own eagles, flew to the imperial throne from that unconsidered trifle in geography, Corsica; and I, Fate-ridden, fell downward from the high-stool of clerkdom to the Inferno of Prague, whereof no Dante hath as yet chanted the bitterness.

In truth, for this I cannot help blaming my father. Author of my being, he was also—as I take it—author of my misery. What! was it his fault that he kept odd volumes of Byron, Shelley, and Co., in his dusty book-shelves? Did not the worthy man forbid thee to peruse such fascinating devilries? and yet thou blamest him for thy nibblings at the fair fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which was denied thee! True—oh, most true!—he did his best to cure

my desire for rhyming; he bound me to good substantial prose of the instructive sort; he burned, like heretics, my matchless "Ode to——" and "Lines on seeing a cat chasing a bird;" he quoted the stock saying of all fathers, culled from the pages of Sir Walter Scott, that "Literature is a good staff, but a bad crutch." He did all that a man, cursed with a scribbling son, could do in such dire straits, and yet—and yet I rushed onward to my doom and reaped full forty-fold the penalties he prophesied would be the outcome of such playing with literary fire.

No; it was not the fault of my father. I hold him blameless, in spite of my thoughtless accusation. I blame the garret, or the ancestor who furnished it with literature, or the publishers who published that literature, or the men who wrote such stuff; but mainly do I blame the garret stocked with books, which led me to another garret stocked with nothing at all, save knife, fork, and dish, which all grew rusty for want of exercise.

O that fascinating garret! nestling so snugly under the eaves of the old house, with the sloping roof, the low door, the gaudy wall-paper, and the dusty piles of books, containing within their shut pages the most charming stories in the world. By Dumas, who was then the god of my juvenile idolatry, I swear that in that dusky chamber I first read the romance of wondrous "Monte Cristo," which gave me the greatest delight of my life. Cooper, with thy heroic Indians, I love thee passing well. Marryat, thy sea tales have stirred my boyish blood. Defoe, with thy "Crusoe" have I started at that mysterious footstep on the lonely sands. But to

none of ye do I bend the knee as I do to that literary giant who told me the fascinating tale of Edmond Dantès, and his Aladdin's cavern of jewels.

How well do I remember my first dip into that ocean of wonders—a dull wet day, whose rainy sky had kept me, delicate in health, from the dreary routine of school. I explored the house from basement to garret, with but cursory glances at the mid-section of dining-room, drawing-room, and bedrooms, which I knew so well. Below there was but little attraction in the region of kitchen and cellar, inhabited by servants, rats, black beetles, and beer casks; but on rising roof-ward, I (the Columbus of the moment) discovered this El Dorado of literature, and, truly, no one was so happy as I at this treasure trove. In the space of half-an-hour, to all outward seeming, I, as made of dust as ever was Father Adam, was tasting of the Tree of Knowledge. Much of the fruit was uneatable, such as sermons, encyclopedias, text-books, atlases, etc.; but deep in a corner I found “Monte Cristo,” and, dragging him from his dusty seclusion, flung open his magic history.

I began reading at once from the first sentence, which is still engraven on my memory: “On the 28th of February, 1815, the watch-tower of Nôtre Dame de la Garde signalled the three-master, the *Pharaon*, from Smyrna, Trieste, and Naples.”

It was mid-day when I thus began to read, and the steady rain beat on the sloping roof like on a drum, as the dull gray light filtered in through the dingy window-panes, darkening with the coming night. But neither the drumming rain nor the fading light

minded I, breathlessly galloping onward to the imprisonment of the hero in that fatal chateau which, to my mind, is the most famous building in the world. Would he escape? would he die? would he remain prisoner? Alas! his fate I was doomed never to know for many years; for my father, mistrustful of the ominous silence of the household pest, pene-



MRS. PRASS.

trated upward to the dim regions of garretdom and discovered my illicit occupation. Then and there, in wrath at such unauthorized tasting of sweets, he confiscated the book, and I, after severe whipping for precocity—most unjustly administered—went supperless to bed, wondering as to what became of the brave Edmond. I verily believe I finished that romance in twenty different ways; but when, years afterward, I read the book, Dumas' ideas were

quite different from mine, but hardly—as I then thought—better.

By Styx!—this ejaculation is a reminiscence of Lempriere—by Styx! the world of those days consisted to me of spondees and trochees, which gave me mighty trouble in mastering. For my part, I preferred my fingers to all the pedantic explanations of



“DISCOVERED THIS EL DORADO OF LITERATURE.”

text-books, which were difficult to understand, whereas the calculating of feet on fingers was easy. Besides, I was not at that time overburdened with morality as regards the ownership of ideas, and filched unmercifully from those who had been fortunate enough to be born when ideas were not so scarce as at present. I bought, or stole, or annexed my goods at all their shops. Milton gave me the idea of an epic which began “Sing, heavenly Muse,” and perished ignominiously at the second book. Shakes-

peare inspired me to write the blankest blank-verse tragedy that was ever penned, in which all the characters died, and delivered interminable soliloquies before dying. And as to Byron, why, with youth's conceit, I strove to complete "Don Juan," and for such licentious rhymings took part in an acting charade on the favorite oath of Zeus, which introduces this paragraph.

True, I forgot that I purposed to speak of Bohemia; but then, I must tell you how I got there. To quote an excellent example of narration, one must begin with Genesis and end with Revelations, which last book in my case will act up worthily to its name, seeing it reveals many hidden things—social wonders of the ocean of London, which have never yet floated to the surface, owing to their lack of ballast in the matter of money or fame, or appreciative publishers.

As I said before, poetry was the cause of my downfall; rhyme, not reason, was the knife with which I proposed to open the world oyster—a sorry knife, truly, as it proved, seeing that it opened but the valves of Bohemia's hungry portals. Alas! how I shiver with horror at the memory of the infamous massacre of the English language perpetrated by me in those salad days—not a word, not a rhyme, single, double, or triple, escaped my vicious pen. I scribbled epics, sonnets, romances, lyrics—all of which were sufficiently bad—and then, as a crowning curse to my existence, I fell in love. Cupid, thou hast much to answer for, seeing that thy malicious wounding of my heart engendered a passion which was the begetter of many amorous ditties addressed to Chloe, whereof one will serve as an example:

TO CHLOE.

(From her Sighing Lover.)

I.

The stars of heav'n are not so bright
 As Chloe's eyes,
 Which constantly, thro' day and night,
 Shed on me beams of tender light,
 In glad surprise.

II.

The snows of earth are not so fair
 As Chloe's breast;
 Their spotlessness cannot compare
 With that white bosom, where I dare
 My head to rest.

III.

The roses sweet are not so red
 As Chloe's cheeks;
 For all their deepest tints have fled
 To her bright face, and there are spread
 When me she seeks.

IV.

O stars! O snows! O roses sweet!
 Tho' fair ye be,
 In Chloe your perfections meet
 To make my heart with rapture beat,
 When her I see.

Do you not mark how I have rifled the sweets of Herrick's garden? or, perchance, you deem that my dainty Lord Rochester hath inspired the verse? Nay, even Suckling, with his "dancing sun," may have sung the ditty Ariel-like in mine ears. Reader, father it as you will, I doubt not that Chloe's beauties moved me to steal strains, for their descrip-

tion, from the elegant note-books of Carolean rakes, with their pipings and liltings fitted for an Arcady à la Watteau. In truth, I love that silken Muse of the Restoration, who threw aside her classic draperies, and, clad in ribbons and laces and French *fa-la-lals*, more suited to her roguish eyes and cherry lips, sang amatory madrigals to the amorous courtiers of our second Charles. Immoral she was, maybe, but out of very lightheartedness; and for once in our respectable England we had the gay wit of Paris at Whitehall. Alas! Mademoiselle the Muse recrossed the Channel at the advent of the Guelphs, and I doubt if we, with all our cravings, can woo her back again to our German Court of St. James'.

But Bohemia?

Sir, I was talking of Chloe, of the Stuart Court, of Arcadian flutings, and Lord knows what else. Bohemia will come in good time; therefore let me linger awhile in the flowery meadows of my innocent youth ere I go downward to that stony-streeted city of London wherein I found Prague—a city within a city, like those balls of ivory, sphere within sphere, carved by purposeless Chinese artificers. But Chloe is—nay, not dead, so think not that I intended afflicting you with elegies and wintry songs of tearful tendency. No, Chloe is alive, and married—though, alas! no bridegroom was I. Corydon could not sing—not even stolen ballads after my fashion—but he had fleecy sheep and daisied meads and firewood for Arcadian winters; therefore Chloe, preferring the real to the ideal, promised to love me like a sister, and became Mrs. Corydon. That promise of sisterly affection nearly broke my heart,

being my first experience of woman's fickleness and eye to the main chance; but she was happy—she is happy, if it be happiness to be the mother of fourteen children, sexes in equal numbers, one for each day in the week. When I think that I—but no, the thought is too philoprogenitive. Let me talk of Bohemia, and how I got there.

Heavens, what a storm in a tea-cup there was, when my father found that I still persisted in my piping of old tunes! Not only did I daily write verse, but I published such sins against sense in the local paper; and there, in bad type, they were seen by my father, flaunting their boldness in the faces of his genteel friends, who considered verse-writing as heinous a sin as Sabbath-breaking. Alas! he was so very respectable, my poor father, that the lame feet of my halting verse entered like iron into his soul; therefore, resorting to strong measures, he perched me on the giddy height of an office-stool, with the laudable intention of breaking short my courting of the draggle-tailed Muse, and converting me into a dry-as-dust lawyer.

Common Sense, you unpleasant goddess, altarless in ancient Athenian days, why did I not sacrifice to thee instead of cutting strange capers at the base of Parnasus? Alas! I know not; but this I do know, that Mesdames le Neuf confused my senses with their jiggings and rhymings to devilish little purpose, seeing that such diversions were the cause of all my troubles. No singing-bird can pipe on the perch of an office-stool, no bard can grasp the prosaic fact that two and two make four; therefore, with me, the consequence was—ah! you can doubtless guess the

consequence, seeing 'tis shrined in the pages of the book before you. Let me draw a veil over the painful interview of father and son, who were fire and water in their antithesis to one another, and come to the main point—which is, of course, Bohemia.

When I left the home of my youth I was quite twenty years of age, and my worldly goods consisted of a good stock of clothing, a ditto of poems, and twenty pounds, being a pound for each year of my life. This was the pottage for which I bartered my inheritance, and, like the poor boy in the fairy tale, I went out into the wide, wide world, which at that time appeared to me to be a land of sunshine and clover, pretty girls, rich benefactors, and flowery meadows. I am afraid my views were hardly correct, as I have discovered but few pretty girls, no rich benefactors, and, as for the flowery meadows, they were all cut up into building allotments, which I was unable to purchase for want of cash.

When one leaves home under such romantic circumstances, one should always deliver a valedictory address—verse being used in preference to prose; at least, 'tis always so in



* "THAT SILKEN MUSE OF THE RESTORATION."

those delightful novels of Mudie's, where the hero is so well off in the third volume. I, however, was at present in the early pages of the first volume of my



"ENTERED LIKE IRON INTO HIS SOUL."

life, and, therefore, pausing according to tradition, began my ode:

Home of my Sires!

This was an excellent beginning; but, unluckily, I could get no further, being for the moment as barren of rhymes as of prospects. Besides, the ode was not marketable, I had no audience, and the morning was very cold—all these excellent reasons for non-delivery

of unasked-for poetry. Probably the Muse did not approve of my turning my back on the good things of this life—for your Muse is a cupboard lover, and can discourse nobly on the blessings of poverty at a well-spread dinner-table—at all events, she came not to my call, and thus was that famous ode as lost to the world as the drowned cantos of *The Faerie Queene*. The obstinacy of the Muse having thus disposed of the ode, I fingered my two ten-pound notes to see that they were safe, shouldered my portmanteau once more—bundle is more romantic, but portmanteau it was—and trudged bravely to the railway station.

Facilis est decensus Averni, and truly having thus started merrily on the down grade, I descended rapidly enough until I came bump into Bohemia. I went by train, which was certainly an unromantic fashion of approaching Prague; but one must not expect pedestrianism from a hero with twenty pounds in his breeches pocket. Moreover, being luxurious in my tastes, I went first-class and bought a newspaper. I have bought many of the latter since, journalistic brains being retailed by grimy youths at the modest sum of one penny; but as to the former, I have never since ridden in a first-class carriage. It was unwise, I admit, but very comfortable, and I had no croaking Cassandra at hand to warn me of coming woes.

Having the whole carriage to myself—which arrangement seemed only just to me, who had a pink ticket marked “first” in my pocket—I had no opportunity of studying human nature, and the other nature of fields and hedge-rows was whirling past too rapidly to admit of much examination. I was there-

fore reduced to reading my paper; and having mastered the fact that Russia did not want Constantinople, and that the British troops (in the last frontier war) had not been defeated, but had only retreated out of prudence, I turned to the advertisements, and was truly astonished at the number of people wanted to do things I could not do. There being no advertisement for a poet, I soon wearied of requests for cooks, footmen, valets, and such-like cattle, therefore left the real for the ideal; in other words, I abandoned the newspaper for my own poems. They seemed to me to be excellent, but probably I was mistaken; for there certainly has not been the competition among editors for their publication that I expected to see. Peace to their ashes! for many are burnt, and others rest in waste-paper baskets, dust-bins, in any receptacle save the hearts and brains of my fellow-men. Very likely my fellow-men are all the better off for not having them by rote, but I certainly am not, and would willingly have parted with such ink-spoiled paper at the rate of a guinea a sheet.

By the way, I ought to mention the place of my birth; but on second thoughts, I will not, as my natal village is not worthy of being thus exalted, and, moreover, I do not want my youthful sins chronicled in memoirs for the delectation of the public by those infernal literary detectives, who would give such best-forgotten things to the world under the name of "Life of Peter —."

Peter! Did I not tell you I was named after the founder of Catholicism? 'Tis not a high-sounding name for the Muse; still, it might have been worse, and besides, rhymes excellently with "metre," which

I could never master, save by the ten-fingered process before mentioned.

Well, here was I on the road to London, and in due course arrived at the city to which all roads lead. Why they should, I entirely fail to see, and such ridiculous centralization is quite a modern invention.

For my part, I would rather be the head of village intellectuality, than tail of hundreds of scribblers luckier than myself, who have free access to their publishers and keep banking accounts. However, although I proposed, Destiny disposed; so here I found myself, on the platform of a noisy station, with the world before me. It was not, at the first glance, an agreeable world, being decidedly foggy—and I never knew until I came to London in November that the sun was a tomato. I have since learned that such is not the case; but certainly the centre of the solar system had a very vegetable appearance



"WITH THE WORLD BEFORE
ME."

through the fog-veil, and was as scarlet as the coat of the Tommy Atkins I saw disappearing round the corner into a beer-shop. Astronomy, however, is very wearisome when one is hungry, so I went to an

adjacent hotel, secured a bed for the night, and had a good luncheon.

After that I went out to see London; but, strange to say, there was more fog than London, which depressed my spirits, and what I did see did not strike me as ravishingly beautiful. Without doubt London is an ugly city; still it is London, and there is a fascination about its miles of bricks and mortar which none can resist. If I were on the strand of some southern isle, kissed by soft waves under the silver shine of the moon, I would assuredly sigh for the other Strand, which is dirty and dingy and yet delightful.

As to the Embankment—but this is not a guide-book, and I must tell you how I found Bohemia. My Prague was in Bloomsbury, whither I had gone in search of the British Museum. I saw the Museum, and also a card in a dingy window, announcing "Lodgings to let for single gentlemen." I was a single gentleman—I wanted lodgings—therefore I knocked at the door, which opened promptly, as if the opener had seen my inquiring eye from behind that ticket. Probably she had, if I can judge from my after-knowledge of her habits. "She! who?" Why, Mrs. Prass.

Ah! Mrs. Prass, thou-who-hadst-seen-better-days landlady, let me shed a tear to thy memory! Thou wast a dear woman, but untidy. Thy lodgings, however, were not dear, though equally untidy; but surely thou must have espied poverty in my attire and anxiety in my eye when thou lettest to me that bleak eyre for the modest sum of five shillings per week—paid in advance. O that dear garret, Mrs.

Prass!—I mean affectionately, and not pecuniarily—how often has its modest door opened to thy timid knock when in quest of the weekly rent? and how many times hast thou departed, *sans* five shillings, with lamb-like murmurs of bills and taxes and obdurate landlords? Yes, Mrs. Prass, we have dwelt in



“OPENED TO THY TIMID KNOCK.”

Bohemia together in amity, therefore will I shed tears over thy grave; for didst thou not save me from mine? Can I forget that weary sickness whereof you cured me with strange herbs, prescribed by old wives, but unknown in the pharmacy of legalized physicians? No, I can never forget thee, who wert

an angel to me, and no black one either, though dingy thy dress from constant dwelling in the Hades of Kitchendom with tribes of black beetles. Sophia Prass, thou art dead; but let my ink dry forever in my pen if I shrine not thy memory in these desultory memoirs of six years of Prague life! Even as I write, that chill afternoon comes back to me, with the apparition of thee with thy toothless mouth mumbling the terms which gave me a castle in Bohemia.

R. I. P., Sophia Prass! But first let me evoke thy phantom from out the mists of the past, and tell of our dealings together, and of the hungry crowd who dwelt in those days beneath thy haggard roof. Did not Aaron the poet, on hearing of thy demise from the lodging-house world, indite a poem to thy memory, whereof the intention was excellent, but the poetry was horrible?

LINES ON A PERISHED LANDLADY.

Oh, sleep in peace, Sophia Prass,
Beneath thy coverlet of grass!
Thy mem'ry will I ever bless,
Thou angel in a dowdy dress!
There have been fairer forms than thine,
And female faces more divine:
I have beheld a straighter nose,
And lips with hues more like the rose;
Some skins, with wrinkles seamed, perhaps
Have less resembled railway maps.
But yet a kindly heart, I ween,
Beat strong beneath thy bombazine;
And those ungainly hands were quick
To help the needy and the sick;

Whose hearts with pleasure would rejoice
Whene'er they heard thy raucous voice,
Which soothed the mourner, calmed the vexed,
With homely truth and quoted text.
Though full of woes and tearful strife,
Thine was not an unlovely life :
Resigned wast thou to Sorrow's rod,
And trusted ever in thy God,
Who surely marked, in Heaven high,
Thy deeds with an approving eye.
Yes, at the final trump of doom
Thy form will as an angel bloom ;
And all thy goodly deeds of yore
Will make thee lovely evermore.
So sleep in peace, contented rest,
With what thou hadst, thou did thy best.

CHAPTER II.

BRAINLAND.

DIABLE!—you perceive I swear in French only, so as to spare the feelings of the compositors, and yours also, gentle reader, who doubtless are ignorant of the English equivalent, other than in the sense in which 'tis used in the fourth line of the thirty-eighth verse of the first canto of "Don Juan." We English do not like such coarseness—unless veiled, when the more transparent the veil the better shall we be pleased. Witness — and —, the names of which books you can doubtless guess. I myself—'tis the author who speaks—I myself have written tales in which I foolishly called a spade a spade, thereby sinning grievously in the eyes of the critics, whose spades are all shovels. It puts me wonderfully in mind of the old game, "Let's pretend;" for they—meaning the critics—pretend that spades are shovels, whereas the modest shovel is—and is well known to be—the indelicate spade. Therefore, in deference to the nice feelings of English readers in general, and English critics in particular, I use the ejaculation *Diab!e!* or "D—:" choose which you please, since both naughtinesses are veiled as discreetly as Turkish odalisques.

Diab!e! but that garret wherein I now took shelter from the inhospitality of the English climate was the most fantastic dwelling of its kind in all fantastic Bohemia. Upward to the surface of the house had

floated all the flotsam and jetsam of furniture, ancient and modern—particularly the former—and stranded themselves in my attic. 'Twas a veritable hospital for the lame and the halt in the matter of necessary chattels, and from my soul I pitied—and cursed—these hapless invalids who so terribly needed the curative hand of the carpenter.

Several chairs, different as to style and doubtful as to supporting power, had settled down on an island of carpet, which in its youth had resembled a flowery meadow, but whose roses, alas! were now as faded as those which had once flushed the sallow cheeks of Mrs. Prass. A round oilcloth-covered table poised itself on one shaky leg, after the fashion of an antique danseuse, and the top being insecurely fastened, wobbled painfully, like a running-down plaything of the same name. This was the drawing-room, and the corner of the apartment most distant from the door proclaimed itself to be the bedroom, by the presence of a narrow couch just short enough for its footboard to catch my ankles, whereby I was compelled to nightly sleep doubled up "S" fashion, after the manner of "Little Ease" prisoners in the Tower. That the last occupant of the garret had been an artist could be easily seen by the charcoal sketches which marred the fair whitewash of the walls, being realistic studies of hands, feet, and heads, also nude trunks outlined in red pencil; so that on the whole there was a battle-field flavor about the walls. Heavens! how those gruesome scribblings haunted me at night, engendering strange dreams wherein the trunks fought viciously with one another for the legs, arms, and heads, of which there was not a

sufficient supply for all. Such nightmares, however, were probably only hallucinations produced by a lack of victuals, cold water only for supper not being calculated to induce dreamless slumbers.

Altogether a unique garret, with but one window looking out on to a wide expanse of red tiles, chimney pots, leads, and gaunt church-steeple. Nor was there lack of life in such stony, or rather brickly, pasturage, seeing that cats and sparrows were as plentiful as smuts, and at times humanity mending roofs, cleaning chimneys, and swinging telegraph wires. Such outlook was perchance natural to the situation, but uninspiring to the poet, so 'tis little to be wondered at that my ideas, at first curtailed by the exigencies of rhyme and metre, speedily lengthened themselves to elastic prose, which was less troublesome and more profitable.

'Twas a poor garret, a cold garret, a windy garret, yet withal there was something lovable about that garret. Many a merry company has assembled within the bareness of its walls, though on most occasions there was no fire, save indeed the sacred fire which was excellent for conversation, but perfectly useless for warming purposes. The Muses, poor maidens, did their best to supply us with what they had of necessaries; but these, pertaining alone to poesy, were scarcely adapted for creature comforts whereof we all stood greatly in need. An ill-furnished company of paupers were we verily, not even possessing pipes of oaten straw for the better fluting of our ditties; which if we had owned, I doubt not would have been devoured as nourishment, so lacking in victuals were we. I knew no cupboard so

akin to Mother Hubbard's as mine, and as to keeping a dog like that ancient dame, I could not keep myself, although I reduced my appetite down to the smallest amount of food on which a modest bard could possibly subsist.

Having thus ticketed the scene "This is a Garret," after the fashion of the Elizabethan dramatist, 'tis surely time for me to march my actors on the stage; a sorry lot truly, as regards wardrobe; but the scene is no gilded hall of Belgravia, therefore must the characters of this Bohemian comedy be in keeping. Nay, sir! would you clap a scarecrow on the golden throne of Prester John, or house a dandy à la d'Orsay in the cellars of Whitechapel? No, by St.—St.—any saint you please—nor will I bring fire and water together in such unnatural fashion.

Do I not need a Parabasis, after the fashion of Athenian comedy, to speak home-truths to the audience, and tell them all things necessary to an understanding of the play, or perchance a Chorus borrowed from a Marlowe-cum-Shakespeare tragedy, to mouth grave speeches, intimating the flight of Time and revealing the gist of the lamentably comic tale? Alas! there are many tales herein, both lamentable and merry, the plots of which 'twould take Chorus many hours to reveal; and as to the flight of Time, think not that I base my remarks of Bohemia and Bohemians on the trite sayings of sundials. *Tempus fugit*—'tis as true in English as in Latin; but, know ye who read these, pages that I have—for a change—left Time and taken to Eternity. Therefore will I speak of present events as those of the past, of the past as pertaining to the future—in fact, play

topsy-turvy with the hours, days, and years that mark the passing of Time. By Saturn, God of Time—*videlicet* Lempriere—if it were not for our hair-splitting of moments into seconds, and seconds into minutes, one could stretch out days into months, and thus die at the early age of two years, or perchance three for octogenarians. Therefore, say I, down with clocks and their imperious tickings! Like the angels in the Revelations, I abolish Time and will tell you things which, going by almanacs, occurred at long intervals, but in these pages are jumbled together in dateless confusion.

Yet with regard to Parabasis or Chorus—which you will—I, being a stranger in Bohemia, must needs have, for such, one thoroughly versed in the customs of the country, to tell of “who comes hither” and “who goes thither;” therefore will I call upon Eugene Delamere, artist and pauper, who starved in the garret facing mine, and with whom I struck up a speedy friendship on the principle that poverty makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows.

Can I ever forget the first time I clapped mine eyes on that six-foot-something of well-made manhood? 'Twas nigh the midnight hour, and I, still infected with home-habits of respectability, was sleeping soundly on my uneasy couch, when up the stairs comes Eugene stumbling: nay, he was sober, I vow, but the ascent was difficult and the gloom Cimmerian. On reaching as near to heaven as he was ever likely to get, Eugene found himself with no more light to illumine his getting to bed than that of the stars, which were but chill substitutes for the cheerful gleam of candles. Presuming, therefore, on the freemasonry

of poverty, he drew my curtains Priam-like in the dead of night—or rather he would have drawn them had such luxuries been there—and demanded the loan of a taper. Thus rudely awakened from my dreamings of Fame, I arose despairingly and gave him what he desired; more than that, I gave him bread-and-cheese and bottled beer, in exchange for which he gave me his views upon art, his early history, which was as long as the line of Macbeth's kings; and his company till dawn, which we saw mistily through clouds of tobacco smoke. Then we retired to our respective couches, and passed the gap of time which parted us in slumber. Eight o'clock P.M. brought night and Eugene, both of whom remained some considerable time. In fact, this owl of an artist preferring night to day made me interchange the legitimate occupations of both, with the result that from red I turned yellow, and, smoked thoroughly by the atmosphere of tobacco, speedily became a fair specimen of those pallid ghosts with fiery eyes who haunt the garrets of Bohemia. Thus it was that I became acquainted with Eugene, who, having dwelt long in Prague, was notable in knowledge concerning its denizens, and fitly plays *Parabasis-Chorus* in cataloguing the mummings of this puppet show.

Alas! Eugene, my friend, how thou hast sobered down from the merry scapegrace of those days! Marriage, money, and success have tamed thy wildness, and I doubt not in thy respectable suburban villa thou wilt shudder when beholding in these pages the spectacle of what thou wast "*Consule Planco.*" Nay, will madam, thy wife, forgive me for revealing to the world such doings of thy bachelor days, of

many of which she is doubtless ignorant? 'Tis a shame thus to dissect, and stuff, and ticket thee before thou art comfortably bestowed in thy grave, yet will I spare thee more than myself in the recital, and though both biographer and biographed, 'tis thou who wilt receive the largest share of flowers more sparingly flung to me. Look, then, Eugene, to thee I hold up the mirror of the past, wherein thou wilt see, not the rosy roundness of thy present prosperity, but the fleshless skull of thy hungry days.

'Tis the nature of all things to come to an end—save indeed the persistence of creditors—and after a week of midnight dialogue, both Eugene and myself found the fountains of our small-talk—artistic, literary, financial, æsthetic—running somewhat dry. I had read him my poems, he had shown me his pictures, and we mutually agreed that both were perfect, which was a different opinion to that held by editors and picture-dealers. We discussed metre, ideas, rhymings, verses, feet, spondees, trochees, for the better understanding of my scribblings; nor did we hesitate to argue by the hour on light, shade, chiaroscuro, design, perspective, composition, and such-like mysteries of the brush. Now, however, we were but dry sponges, having squeezed all the ideas out of one another; therefore was it an excellent thought of my friend, the artist, to suggest the introduction into our lives of other men and other thoughts for the sake of variety.

“Aaron, the poet,” said Eugene, helping himself plentifully to my tobacco,—“Aaron, the poet, gives an ‘At Home’ this evening.”

“Two things in that speech strike me as strange,”

I answered, removing the tobacco-jar beyond the reach of Eugene's grabbings: "First, that a poet should be called Aaron; second, that he should have a home."

"As to the first, he is descended in a straight line from Adam, *via* the brother of Moses; and if he decks his attic with the comfortable-sounding name of home, sweet home, who is to say him nay?"

"No one, my incorrect quoter of Shakespeare. So he writes poetry?"

"By the yard; but he does not sell it. Epics being a drug in the market at present."

"As they have been since the days of Homer."

"Precisely. 'Tis wonderful how unanimous the human race have been in all ages in refusing to dance to the pipings of poets. *Laus Deo* that I had not the scribbling itch!"

"Humph! your painting itch is scarcely better, seeing your garret is as ill-furnished as mine."

Eugene laughed at the parry, and surrendered at discretion.



"SIX-FOOT-SOMETHING OF WELL-MADE MANHOOD."

"We are, I fear, on the eve of a profitless argument, Peter. Doubtless I can oppose Leighton to your Tennyson, and you can quote Aaron against my braggings of myself; therefore, in success and failure the Muses are equal—as they should be, seeing they are sisters inheriting devilish little from their father, Apollo."

"Who, by the way, was not their father."

"Ah, bah! no genealogy, please. Let us drop into Aaron's symposium."

"Agreed! But first let me put on my evening dress."

'Twas but a smoking-jacket of rainbow tints, remnant of early vanity and credit at my tailor's—still, the colors were gay, far gayer indeed than the heart of the wearer; but I plucked up my spirits at being thus bravely apparelled, and stepped down with Eugene to the garret of Aaron, which was the antipodes of mine, *i. e.* directly under my feet.

Mrs. Prass regarding lights on the stairs as sinful luxuries, we two stood veiled in darkness before the door of the attic, and smote strongly against its stout timbers for admission into the sanctum of the Hebrew Muse.

"Open! open! in the name of the law and the prophets!" cried Eugene, battering at the door as though 'twere the gate of a besieged town. "The Gentiles stand on the threshold of the child of Israel."

They did not stand long, however: for in response to this imperious summons, the door was hospitably unbarred and we saw hook-nosed, pallid-faced Aaron, with his bright eyes obscured by a *pince-nez*, glimmer spectre-like through the clouds of tobacco smoke wherewith his brethren were incensing the Muse.

"Enter in unto the Promised Land," said Aaron, as we plunged forward into the mouth of the Pit as typified by the smoke. "'Tis not overflowing with milk and honey, but has a fair share of tobacco and beer, luxuries of which my vagabond progenitors were ignorant."

"Politeness," observed Eugene, whirling me round so as to face our host; "politeness was instilled into me with the aid of the birch, therefore am I mindful of etiquette. Aaron, let me present to you Peter, who dwells in the garret-heaven above your head. Make your obeisance, Peter; and you respond, offspring of Jacob, for ye both are poets and but poor scribblers of ill-considered verse."

"Candor is the most disagreeable of virtues," said Aaron, conducting me to a shaky chair with as much ceremony as though 'twere a throne. "'Tis an abuse of words which were given to us to conceal our thoughts. Sit down, Sir Poet Peter, and make merry. It is a feast-night with us, in honor of my birth."



"HOOK-NOSED, PALLID-FACED
AARON."

"What editor's till have you been robbing?" growled Eugene, noting the tokens of rejoicing ostentatiously displayed.

"None! Brains are now so common that editors' tills are empty, which is more than are their waste-paper baskets. No; the needful for this holy-day came from the disposal of certain poor raiment lent to mine uncle."



"MY UNCLE ROUND THE CORNER."

Chorus of Guests: "My uncle! oh, my uncle! my uncle round the corner."

"We were singing the ditty when you battered down our defences," exclaimed Aaron, reseating himself at the head of the table. "'Tis one not to be found in the music shops, owing to its cap fitting all. A thing began is half done, so let this be done since 'tis begun, and afterward, Eugene, you can introduce our new brother to those who are at present hidden in mist—tobacco mist—like the deities of Homer."

They gave me a pipe, which had seen long service and was as charred as a Yule log after Christmas; also a broken cup containing beer of an inferior vintage, both of which aids to cheerfulness were acceptable.

Having sampled the tobacco and malt—both

alas! sufficiently villanous in taste—I looked round the room and saw haggard faces, like at a Feast of Famine, protruding from the kindly smoke which strove, but insufficiently, to veil such ghastliness; yet all the countenances were jovial, some even merry—the more so when Aaron began lilting the following delectable jingle of rhyming:

MY UNCLE ROUND THE CORNER.

AARON (*inquiringly*):

Who is it owns a little shop
Where we our household goods can pop,
And into which we often drop?

CHORUS (*with conviction*):

My uncle round the corner!

AARON (*curiously*):

Who is it aids us in our need,
By taking clothes long run to seed,
On which for an advance we plead?

CHORUS (*gratefully*):

My uncle round the corner!

FULL CHORUS (*with stamping accompaniment*):

My uncle! oh, my uncle! my uncle round the
corner,

Whose dingy halls

Have golden balls,

My uncle round the corner!

(*Drinks all round, to cool thirsty throats.*)

II.

AARON (*pointedly*):

Who is it when our cash is spent

Produces soon the weekly rent,

By lending it at cent per cent.?

CHORUS (*joyfully*):

My uncle round the corner!

AARON (*indignantly*) :

Who it is draws into his net
All things of ours which he can get,
And keeps them till his bills are met?

CHORUS (*sadly*) :

My uncle round the corner!

FULL CHORUS (*with renewed stamping*) :

My uncle! oh, my uncle! my uncle round the
corner;
Whose dingy halls
Have golden balls,
My uncle round the corner!

"'Tis a sad song," said Aaron, wiping his eyes.
"I wrote it with my heart's blood."

"If you wrote such verse for the burlesque stage
you'd make a fortune," retorted Eugene dryly.

"What! dress the Muse in tinsel for the engender-
ing of empty laughter? Never!"

"Eh! Eh! '*Video meliora proboque, deteriora
sequor.*'"

"'Tis but a rhyme inspired by the goddess Neces-
sity. No Erato was at its birth-throes, wherefore it
came into the garret-world deformed in shape and
halting in its gait. As to your classicism, I can
match your quotation with another also borrowed
from the end of the dictionary, '*Dulce est desipere in
loco.*'"

"See what a thing it is to be learned," murmured
Eugene ironically; "he knows Latin and the use of
gloves, which knowledge has brought him to—this."

"Ah, bah! A truce to your railing, Timon of
London. Introduce Peter to the company."

By this time the vapors had rolled away and I

saw a bridge—oh, confound *The Vision of Mirza!*—and I saw the company consisted of seven or eight men in all stages of poverty, from the overcoat worn, morn, noon, and night to hide the lack of under-garments, to the ostentatious wearing of greasy frock-coats which in their dandy days had rubbed elbows in St. James' Clubs with titled clothing.

"Here," said I to myself—"here is a chapter for Herr Teufelsdröckh. These rags, scarce protecting the wearers from the inclemency of the weather, doubtless clothe the bodies of our future philosophers, poets, artists and such-like hardy plants which bloom beneath the bitter sky of adversity in the bleak gardens of the slums. Alas! if——"

But at this moment my sartorial-floricultural meditations were cut short by the uprising of Eugene to perform the part of Chorus and introduce the company to my notice by name. As each individual was christened and catalogued he arose to his feet, and bowing gravely sat down again, so that the entire ceremony was like the rising and falling of pianoforte keys and the naming of animals by Father Adam.

"Observe, my Peter," prologuised Eugene with easy impudence which was taken in very good part by the company—"observe that all the creatures present are males. Nothing to do with the penny post, I assure you; but rather touching the physical formation of featherless bipeds. Feminine influence is absent to-night. I believe Feminine Influence occupies itself on the stage, on the sewing-machine and such-like frivolities, else would you see these beasts paired of either sex like the live stock of Father Noah leaving the Ark. Therefore for the nonce we are a

company of bachelors, incomplete humanities according to the half theory of Plato. Still we are happy."

"Moderately so," said Aaron with a sigh.

"I thank thee, Jew, for that word; we are moderately happy, but the night is young and the liquor plentiful."

"Moderately so," again said Aaron with sigh number two.

"Again my poetic friend qualifies my adjective with his adverbial interpolation, so it appears we are moderately so both as regards beer and happiness, which is but right, seeing that moderation is the corner-stone of dissipation. As for our other qualifications, we are all young and all hard-up, saving Peter, who is a millionaire to the extent of seventeen pounds or thereabouts."

Sensation among the audience, who look upon Peter the Millionaire with envy, tempered with hope as to his possibility of standing treat from a beer point of view.

"After these general remarks," said Eugene, waving his pipe gracefully, both to emphasize his remarks and disperse the tobacco-smoke, which was making him cough; "I will proceed to name the animals. Yon semblance of a man opposite to you, Peter, is Julius Dansford, who has written a tragedy worthy of Shakespeare. It is entirely new and original, being in five acts with treble the number of characters, and contains seven dying soliloquies of forty lines each. Bow to the tragedy, Peter; for it has had the honor of being rejected by every manager in London except one, who proposed to stage it at the expense of its author. Adjoining this

votary of Melpomene sits Lionel Amberton, who is the author of five novels so much in advance of the age that they have never been printed. Still he is worthy of respect, as he once spoke to an editor. Reverence, Peter, the man who has crossed verbal swords with the potentate of the printing office, and been ignominiously defeated by the minion of the Fourth Estate. Lower down you will perceive a thin figure: 'tis not a skeleton, but a man—one Mark Trevanna, whose Hamlet, when he gets a chance, will show that the Dane's melancholy arose from liver. It will be a new reading, and interesting to the proprietors of Patent Pills. At present our future Hamlet is appearing as a footman in the farcical comedy *Up the Spout*, now running at the Siddons' Theatre, which, as you know, is devoted to 'improving-the-masses drama.' At present it has improved nothing, not even the liquor which I would not advise you to drink unless a friend stands treat. Interval for rest and refreshments."

He took a long drink of beer and turned his broken handled jug upside down to show it was empty; after which he pursued his cynical, bitter, serio-comic speech as follows:

"As to Aaron, the Jew whom Shakespeare never drew, he, as you know, scribbles poems which would be as excellent as those of Heine, had he only the genius of that poet as well as his nationality. We hope still, however, to call him the English Aristophanes, seeing what a population of knaves and fools he has, upon which to exercise his irony and wit. David Venders, yon large soul in a small body, is a sculptor whom Phidias might envy; he

is not yet an R. A., but amuses himself, for the sake of bread, by making clay figures for sale, until he confirms his fame in marble and is able to purchase a chip of the Carrara Quarries. Next him, the tenor of the age, Signor Bianco *née* White, whose voice has been the victim of five different systems of singing all equally opposed to one another. At present he sings in the chorus while studying Lohengrin for Covent Garden, and his name is Italianized, because his fellow-countrymen think that no good can come out of Nazareth, by which I mean England. Smile on our Mario, Peter, for he has a bird in his throat, only the poor fowl is starving for want of nutriment. His—and our—devoted friend Reginald Franklin is near him, whose 'Witch of Endor' overture you will hear to-night if Aaron's piano is not yet pawned. This grand work will be accompanied by the violin of Edward Rax, who, buried in beer, tobacco, and melancholy, sits yonder wondering if the English will stand a man whose name is not in twenty consonants with two vowels to hold them together. Finally, observe the philosophic face of Richard Halston, who desires to regenerate the age, but who wants food to keep him alive while doing so. These, Peter, are our jewels; but, like many jewels, are still in the earth and undiscovered by a telescopic generation who see not the genius of their fellow-countrymen while seeking for German, French, Polish, and Italian talent. All present are men bound to be famous, if they die not of inanition meanwhile; they will be written down, or written up, blamed or praised, according to their friendliness with critics, and are probably destined for either

Westminster Abbey or a pauper's grave. In myself you behold the successor of Sir Frederick Leighton, when my great work, 'Xantippe scolding Socrates,' comes before the world; but though with this brilliant destiny before me I am not proud, and will willingly accept a fresh jug of beer with a head as good as my own on it. Gentlemen! Paupers all, I have introduced you to Peter, so now let me introduce Peter to you. He is a poor but virtuous youth—therefore corrupt not his morals—and shares the hospitality of Mrs. Prass at the moderate charge of five shillings a week. He writes poetry, and will read it to you should you be hardy enough to evince the slightest desire to hear it, and I look on him as the successor to the Laureateship, after Aaron has refused the post. I need say no more. My speech has been long, so has your patience; it has been dry, so is my throat; therefore, gentlemen, with your permission——”

The rest of the sentence was lost in the depths of the freshly-filled beer-jug, from whence the orator emerged like a giant refreshed.

“Do I understand Eugene to say that Peter is a millionaire?” asked Julius, the playwright.

“To the extent of seventeen pounds,” I said bashfully.

“The liquor you said, Aaron, was moderate,” hinted Reginald, the musician.

“One bottle each,” replied Aaron, after a rapid calculation. “’Tis hardly enough.”

“Not half enough,” said Eugene, who had again finished his cracked jug.

On this hint I produced ten shillings with alacrity.

"If you will allow me——"

Chorus enthusiastically:

"We will! we will! Fill the flowing bowl! Bravo, Peter!"

"Julius, take the ten shillings and lay it out in beer," said Aaron, with great glee. "Reginald, go with him to bring back the soul-cheerer; and Mark, go also to watch the pair and see they stay not to finish a bottle on the way."

Reginald and his friend vanished rapidly, like a vision of the night, and after them fled Mark to keep an eye on their honesty.

Meanwhile the philosopher, whose dexterity was notable, danced a bacchanalian ballet expressive of joy, and was accompanied on the piano by Aaron, who spared neither black nor white notes in his efforts to evolve harmony, and played the devil with the long suffering instrument. The ballet was only brought to an end by the philosopher falling prone on the floor, whereupon a committee of three sat on his prostrate body, and disregarding his groans arising from being made a sofa of, called upon the Tenor of the Age to favor the company with a ditty. Signor Bianco *née* White was only too willing to oblige, and having finished his beer in case his next-door neighbor should perform that pleasing duty for him, executed a series of runs and shakes to be sure that his lungs were all right. As it happened, his voice was more in tune than the piano, but as the latter was soft and the former loud, it did not much matter.

"Gentlemen, if you will allow me," he said, running his fingers over the yellow notes, "the treat will



"THE NIGHTINGALE SANG."

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be a song: words by Aaron, music by Reginald, and sung by myself."

"We are protectionists here, Peter," cried Aaron, with a grimace, "and patronize no goods save those of home manufacture. Hush, Philosopher Richard! when the nightingale sings the goose keeps silence." The nightingale sang!

THE LAMENT OF ARCADY.

I.

Ah! Corydon, what days were those
When blithe we watched our flocks together,
Before old age our tresses froze
And turned them white as wint'ry weather!
When eyes were bright and hearts were young,
Nor dreamed we of our future woes,
The golden age by poets sung,
Ah! Corydon, what days were those!

II.

Ah! Corydon, what days are these,
When o'er the fire we sit in sorrow,
And hear the chill wind shake the trees,
Foretelling but a sad to-morrow;
When eyes are dull and hearts are sore,
Nor has our singing power to please
The bitter age unknown of yore,
Ah! Corydon, what days are these!

Ah! my sorrowful nightingale, thou art dead now—sang thy heart away for the sake of a woman who danced it beneath her feet—yet will I recall the tender melancholy of thy song when thou, prisoned singing bird, piped sadness in that bleak garret. "Ah! Corydon, what days were those!" poor enough indeed; yet better for thee, unhappy minstrel, with thy

golden throat, than these times when, thy fluting stilled for ever, thou liest at rest beneath alien skies. With smiles on thy face, yet tears in thy voice, do I remember thee in that first night of my Bohemian pleasure, when a hush fell on thine audience as they listened to thy recital of the woes of Corydon so akin to thine own. White thy name: white thy soul: yet whiter than either, the snows of that wintry land in whose breast thou art laid, poor victim of a coquette. Yet 'tis not of the future I must speak, but of the present, of thine Arcadian pipings, and of the arrival of the beer.

The bearers were honest, and had drank none of it. At least, so averred the watcher, but as one bottle was missing, I had my doubts as to the honest fulfilment of his mission, and deemed—not unjustly—that he had been bribed to silence by a share of that which he was sent to guard. Still one swallow of liquor does not make a summer, nor one missing bottle a disagreement; therefore, out of my ten shillings were the cracked cups, jugs, glasses, and mugs filled with the generous malt to my health. A right merry welcome they gave me, and for a treat Reginald performed his "Witch of Endor" overture, which was of the most advanced school and taxed all the resources of that out-of-date piano.

'Twas an evening of great pleasure to me, and never since have I expended ten shillings to such advantage. Wit, laughter, good-will, and smiles were as plentiful as the patches on their clothing, and 'tis of this company I propose to speak. I will tell thee their stories wherein joy clasps hands with sorrow—I will reveal to thee their tears, their smiles, their

risings to prosperity and their sinkings into misery; yet through all such sombreness thou wilt see the golden thread of hope run lightly, as slides the wintry sunbeam across snow-charged skies.

This is Bohemia, these are its denizens; and as to how they came there, what they did, and when they left—read and thou wilt see.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHILDREN OF HAM.

SIR OR MADAM:—I would have you keep in mind, while perusing these pages, that truth is stranger than fiction, else will you think that I, following slavishly my trade of author, have drawn freely upon the imaginative account of my brain. 'Tis not a new remark certainly, but one which bears frequently quoting, seeing how apt are all to look upon stories as but the children of dreams. Yet even dreams, as I have heard tell, are based upon some quirk of the brain arising from real events of the waking hours: therefore in these dreams thus materialized you will find "Truth" as easily as at the bottom of a well; though the poor creature is so much decked out in the frills and furbelows of fiction, that 'twere hard to name her at first sight. I protest that I am ready, and not unwillingly, to make affidavit that this chapter contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth concerning that mad freak wherein Eugene, myself, and Signor Bianco changed our color and nationality, becoming for twelve hours or thereabouts negro slaves, as black as the midnight sky beneath which we sang.

But for lack of bread such an event would not have happened, nor would we have become ebonized as to complexions had our three several cupboards been less barren of provender. To do my companions

justice, 'twas I who suggested the masquerade—in no serious mood 'tis true; but so desperately ill-supplied was the commissariat, that the jest speedily became earnest and we turned ourselves into three black crows—Jim crows, which transmogrification led us into marvellously queer straits.

“If,” said I to my brother paupers on the evening in question—“if we could only earn enough for supper.”

“If wishes were horses, ’ etcetera,” retorted the signor bitterly: “I would we were such animals, then we might at least have enough to eat; but being only human beings, of course it does not matter.”

“It would matter very much being a cab-horse,” observed Eugene grimly: “badly off as we are, between the shafts of a hansom were a worse plight.”

“You have nothing in your cupboard, signor?” I asked, half hopefully.

“Plates only!”

“And you, Eugene?”

“Ditto, with the addition of a leaky jug or so. Oh! never fear, Peter, I have examined my shelves thoroughly and can espy not so much as a mouse—which if I did, I would catch and cook.”

“’Twould be a lean beast, considering the state of your larder. There is nothing to pawn among the three of us?”

“Nothing! Our wardrobes, as you know, are reduced to what we wear—three suits without waist-coats. I would fig-leaves were fashionable, then might we raise further sums on these ill-fitting clothes; but some absurd prejudice seems to prevail against a naked man taking his walks abroad.”

"Can't you sing, signor?"

"Yes, like Mario; but to no purpose. The picture wants the frame, the voice the stage—I should not make a cent on the streets."

"Eh!" cried I, inspired with a sudden idea, "and why not? I can scrape the fiddle in fine style, and I have heard Eugene on occasions pick out false notes on a banjo. You, signor, sing like a nightingale, therefore, why should not we three go out into the streets and earn a supper with these accomplishments?"

"We have no fiddle," objected Eugene, laughing at the idea.

"And no banjo," added the signor ruefully; "besides, we might be recognized, and then good-by to my hopes of Covent Garden. No *impresario* would take his Lohengrin from the gutter."

"Oh, rubbish! No one knows you, unit among millions as you are. Besides, your future audiences dwell in Belgravia, not in Bloomsbury. As to instruments, let us borrow Rax's violin; 'tis not yet pawned, for I heard him scraping 'Dead Marches' an hour ago."

"Good! as to the violin; and the banjo?"

"Laura has one. She is doing Pocahontas in the new burlesque at the Frivolity, and has been practising plantation melodies on a hired instrument."

"It is not a bad idea," said Eugene, with an uneasy laugh; "suppose we put it into practice. I will steal Laura's banjo, Peter will annex the violin, and as for our Mario, he carries his instrument in his throat."

"I might be recognized," repeated the signor obstinately.

"*Diable!* how particular you are!" cried I testily, for temper goes when supper is at stake; "if that is your only objection, let us black-cork our faces and go out as a nigger quartette."

"A quartette of three?" scoffed Eugene, jeeringly. "Oh, Paddy, hast thou never been to school? But as regards your African idea, I think we can manage it. There are plenty of corks here, thanks to Peter's bibulous propensities."

"And plenty of white papers to make collars and cuffs. What do you say, gentlemen?"

They hesitated at first, and smiled scornfully at the idea with a last effort of pride; but such effort reminded them so forcibly of the existence of that vacuum which nature abhors, that they were fain to yield—and thus we three, being all of one mind, went off to gather materials for our masquerade.

Laura was, as usual, at the theatre, so there was no difficulty about her instrument, which Eugene thieved with monkey-like dexterity; but Rax, whom we found sitting in the dark for lack of candles, at first refused to part with his precious fiddle, on which he was playing serenades to the cats on the house-tops. Ultimately we prevailed on him to loan the instrument by promising him a share of the supper which we were going out to earn. For the moment we thought he also would join our string-band, and thus render the quartette complete; but having had a moderately good breakfast with Laura, to whom he was teaching nigger minstrelsy for her burlesque, he said haughtily, that he was not yet reduced to such degradation, and so bowed us out with Don-like contempt. Lord, how a full stomach does puff up a man!

"I would not do that," says Dives, reading in his club newspaper that some poor wretch has stolen a loaf. Wait, Dives, till you occupy the position of Lazarus, and then see if your well-fed morality will stand the test of starvation!

We fixed ourselves up in fine style for our *début* in public; for our clothes being misfitting, old, and patched, these same, with the addition of black faces, and huge paper-collars of abnormal size, made us look sufficiently grotesque, and so like were we to scarecrows, that each laughed at the other's appearance, despite the bitterness and humiliation of the whole affair.

Luckly 'twas now dark, and hidden by the friendly veil of night, we stole shame-facedly and black-facedly from the abode of Mrs. Prass, who would assuredly have expired on the spot, had she met three such scarecrows in the out-going. Once in the street, however, our courage revived, and we began to look upon such African expedition as rather amusing than otherwise; so trudged bravely along in the direction of Tottenham Court Road, where we hoped to charm a few pennies out of ragged pockets by our mellifluous pipings. Performers, instruments, vocalist, stage-dresses, we had them all; but what about the programme? This important item of the "show" we had forgotten to prepare; and now ensued a lively discussion, in which the entire strength of the company took part, as to what would please the masses.

"What, in the name of Wagner, shall I sing them?" said the signor, with a look of comic perplexity on his black face. "A song of Tosti's?"

“No! they want no musical hysteria. Besides, neither Eugene nor myself are a trained orchestra; we must sing something with a chorus and, if possible, a ballet.”

“You’ll have to be *danseuse*, Peter; my long legs



“PRACTISING PLANTATION MELODIES ON A HIRED INSTRUMENT.”

would tie themselves speedily in a knot were I to court Terpsichore.”

“How the deuce can I dance while doing the

Paganini business? Signor, you must sing and dance also."

"I? Why, dancing's an unknown art to me!"

"The more shame to you, considering you sing in a chorus and see ballets every night. However, do your best, just kick about a bit; we can't give them Taglioni at the price."

The signor consented, under compulsion, not without certain misgivings as to the suppleness of his joints, which were, I doubt not, as stiff as his pride—now about to have a fall.

"Let us sing, 'My Uncle Round the Corner,'" suggested Eugene, who doesn't use what he is pleased to call his brains as much as he ought.

"Too full of personalities for such a poor audience as we shall have."

"'The Lost Chord?'"

"They've been dosed with that hourly for the last fifteen years."

"'Home, Sweet Home?'"

"And half the audience haven't got any. My dear Eugene, your ideas are primitive."

"Oh! very well," said Eugene in a huff; "suggest something yourself."

"'Ho! Ho! Dinah?'"

"A nigger melody?"

"Well, aren't we niggers, *pro tem.*? We must give the local coloring."

"We've done so—to our faces."

"Signor White—I mean Black—don't exercise your wit at the expense of our pride. Oh, my poor mother, that I should come to this!"

"If you mean our destination," said Eugene,

looking round critically; "we're arrived at it. Here's a public and an audience."

"All half-seas over!"

"So much the better, they won't mind our bad playing."

'Twas a side street off a crowded thoroughfare, sufficiently quiet, yet within hail of humanity. As



"EACH LAUGHED AT THE OTHER'S APPEARANCE."

a matter of fact humanity, both male and female, were passing in and out of the public-house near which we stood—one of those brilliantly lighted gin-palaces whose warmth and glitter tempt the weary pedestrian out of the cold night when he or she is lucky enough to possess a queen's-head in copper, gold, or silver. Far off we could hear the twanging

and the hoarse voices of a rival company of singers, while moving restlessly round us rambled a raffish crowd, whose faces, brutalized with drink, were worthy of the pencil of Hogarth; but who took but small heed of us, being used to African minstrelsy of the burnt-cork species.

"We must play the audience in," whispered the signor in a stage aside. "Strike up music."

"What kind of music?"

"Anything! everything!—so long as it suggests something."

"I hope it suggests generosity," I muttered, placing the violin beneath my chin. "O misery! 'To what base uses do we come, Horatio.'"

Eugene strummed two or three notes on his instrument and I began sawing away bravely at "My Cottage in the Wood," which, owing to my nervousness, was the only melody I could call to mind. Unfortunately, it had no Orpheus-like effect on the fast-gathering audience, who seemed somewhat critical in their choice of music and began to make extremely rude remarks concerning our harmonies, which I confess were not always agreeable owing to a want of skill in both musicians.

"Crikey! it's the tune the old cow died of."

"What sort, eh, Maria?"

"You ought to be fed on soup, you ought."

"Give us something that ain't got a corpse in it, there's a dear!" cried one lady, dressed brilliantly in green satin, bouncing up to Eugene, whose handsome figure had evidently attracted her attention.

Conceive the wound our artistic susceptibilities received at our overture being thus scornfully dealt

with! Both Eugene and myself felt deeply hurt, the more so when we discovered that the signor, whom sympathy with our fiasco should have kept silent, was sniggering in a most offensive way. It was evidently no use trying to educate the masses up to our standard of melody; so, as musical director, I took "My Cottage in the Wood" out of the bill and substituted the song, "Ho! Ho! Dinah," with choral and chorigraphic effects.

This lively melody, which was not half so high-class as "My Cottage," met, I regret to say, with the unqualified approval of the fickle populace—the more so when the signor, urged to desperation by his increased feeling of hunger, started singing after the mode of his last system of vocal training, and piped out these meretricious words in fine style:

SIGNOR BIANCO (*from the principal European Opera Houses*):
Who am de gal I want to see?

CHORUS (*by Orchestra*):
Chick-a-biddy Dinah!

SIGNOR BIANCO (*con amore*):
Who's de gal am fond ob me?

CHORUS (*playing vigorously*):
Chick-a-biddy Dinah!

SIGNOR BIANCO (*cantante leggiero*):
I'se a-going to dance and sing,
Till her to de door I bring,
Round her den my arms I'll fling.

ORCHESTRA AND VOCALIST:
Chick-a-biddy Dinah!

CHORUS (*unaccompanied, so as to leave Orchestra free to dance*):

Ho! ho! Dinah, look out ob de winda,
 Ho! ho! Dinah, come out to de door;
 Dis nigger want a kiss ob you
 Just to show you lub him true,
 Den he'll leave you nebber, nebber—

Nebber, nebber more.

By the daughter of Herodias! I never saw such capering in all my life! Sure, our negro melody must have possessed some tarantula-like qualities; for its lilting caught the capricious fancy of the public and the whole audience joined us in the dance with a vigor which put our poor efforts to shame. Never since Orpheus first charmed brutes with his fiddle-stick had there been such saltatory friskings; it was like a glimpse of the "Walpurgis Night" to see these ragged creatures, with uplifted arms and reeling feet, skipping about like goats to the jiggling of the tune. The whole humanity which packed the narrow street was gyrating rapidly, like a throng of whirling dervishes, and the insidious contagion of the dance ran like wildfire through the swaying mass. Green Satin, howling wildly, was the worst, twisting about like a Mænade in the frenzied rout, the more resembling a worshipper of Bacchus as her head was not unaffected by early-evening potations. I blushed through my artificial blackness at her shameless kicking, and was glad when the more decent crowd hemmed in and hid her acrobatic leaping. Aghast stood we at the result of our pipings, and never was magician more astonished at the spirits he raised than were we three pseudo negroes at



"GREEN SATIN."

11

the sight of this mob of drunkards abandoning themselves to the diabolical fascination of the music. In horror at such a Dionysia we paused in our singing; upon which the crowd, worn out with their hysterical jumpings, stood suddenly still, turned for the moment into stone statues; and, after a second of dead silence, began clamoring for a renewal of the intoxicating melody.

"Now is the time to send round the hat," said Eugene, with masterly generalship: "take mine, signor; 'tis the largest; and say the more money we get, the longer will we give them 'Ho! Ho! Dinah!'"

'Twas the age of bronze, truly; for in response to the signor's proclamation that the performance would be repeated on the same being paid for in advance, there was a perfect hailstorm of coppers into Eugene's dilapidated head-gear, which became heavier in proportion to the lightening of our hearts.

"It cannot be less than five shillings," said the signor in an agitated whisper, as he shovelled the bronze coinage into his breeches pocket, and returned Eugene's head-gear; "we've struck oil."

I think myself the crowd would have struck us had we not recommenced our fiddling; for having paid their money they naturally wanted their money's worth. So the signor sang, we scraped and strummed, and at the repetition of the chorus the whole street was again in fierce commotion. 'Twas but little use singing, for the silvery notes of the signor were swallowed up in the hoarse roar of those gin-cracked voices; so, over and over again, we played the chorus, and wilder and wilder jumped, danced, leaped, and screamed the crowd. People came to

their windows to look out at this revolution in a tea-cup, and we had glimpses of wary policemen on the verge of the crowd, pausing ere they made up their minds to disperse that whirling multitude of ragged fiends.

At length the rival band of street-singers, attracted by the success of our entertainment, arrived on the scene; and, resenting our usurpation of their trade, seemed disposed to be nasty, the more so when they saw the signor counting the vast store of coppers which he had collected.

“Three shillings and twopence!” cried the future Lohengrin exultingly, as he restored the money to his pocket. “Let us go away at once and get supper.”

At this moment one of the rival minstrels—a burly, brutal fellow, with a piebald face, made a snatch at the signor’s hand, wherein he held still a few coppers, and succeeded in tumbling two of them on to the pavement, from whence they were speedily picked up by his nimble-fingered companions. Maddened at the loss of our hard-earned gains, the signor—not unacquainted with the noble art of self-defence—let out his right straight from the shoulder and levelled the thief in his native mud. With savage howls his companions rushed to his rescue—upon seeing which, Eugene handed me the banjo to take care of, and sailed in wrathfully to the combat.

After this the deluge!

Whether the crowd got some surplus knocks from his hard fists I know not; but this I do know and am prepared to swear to, that each ragamuffin of that assemblage, thinking his neighbor’s hand was against him, hit out wildly to all points of the com-

pass; with the result that in two minutes the innocent diversion of the dance was exchanged for the fierce delight of battle. Talk about war correspon-



"LEVELLED THE THIEF IN HIS NATIVE MUD."

dents and their prose run mad, 'twould take the rolling lines of Homer to fitly describe the sanguinary conflict which now ensued!

I, having the borrowed instruments to look after, could do but little, so flattened myself pancake fashion against the wall of the gin-palace; while Eugene raged up and down like a lion, strewing the stony street with howling enemies, and the signor, much

put to in preserving his face from blows and his pockets from thieves, performed prodigies of valor. Nor was Green Satin backward in the fray; she revelled in carnage, and seeing an excellent opportunity of paying off old scores without being found out, made at some female friends tooth and nail with such vigor that she speedily reduced them to squealing heaps of damaged finery.

Alas! we three unfortunates suffered bitterly from the police that night, seeing they haled us hence, despite our asseverations of innocence, to the narrow confines of prison cells—yet must I admire the bravery of our captors in plunging so boldly into that maëlstrom of rascality, in the interests of law and order. Batons were freely employed rapping obstinate skulls, which was but natural, seeing that the owners of such skulls, using feet and hands with the addition of teeth, kicked, punched, bit, and scratched with such right good-will that it seemed as though the mob would prevail in the end. Blind fury, however, speedily succumbed to discipline; for the men in blue dispersed the combatants, and marched off a goodly number of prisoners to the police station, among which unfortunates were ourselves, charged—most unjustly, I consider—with being the ring-leaders of the riot.

Desirous of preserving our *incognito*, that we might not lose our last rag of respectability, we all three—poet, singer, and artist—kept a discreet silence; and were forthwith, in company with our hard-earned three shillings, bundled into a gloomy cell, to pass the night in reflections of no very pleasant a nature.

Alack, that night! 'Twas as interminable as the twenty-four hour darkness wherein was Hercules begot—the more so as, in addition to our bruises and ignominious position, we were still hungrier than when we set out, so full of hope, from our poor garret. Not even a pipe of tobacco to solace the sadness of our weary souls, and but doleful converse of a melancholy nature, until I, remembering the plight of Master François Villon in the prison of Meung-sur-Loire, bethought myself of his excellent rhyming in like circumstance; so forthwith made and recited a ballade of our woes, which was but sourly received by my inattentive fellow-prisoners:

A BALLADE OF DISCONTENT.

Concerning the portion of wealth allotted to poor poets, after the mode of Master Villon of Paris.

I.

Alack, good friends, what woes are ours
 In thus becoming Fortune's sport!
 Though we through years of weary hours
 Have paid the goddess constant court,
 With frowns she scorns our sad deport,
 From share of wealth our craft excludes;
 Grim Poverty is our escort—
 We have no store of worldly goods.

II.

We suffer much, poor slaves of art,
 With our sad *frères* of lyre and pen;
 In starving worlds we dwell apart,
 Nor share the joys of duller men.
 We weary of the garret den,
 Wherein no lavish purse intrudes;
 How can our hearts be merry, when
 We have no store of worldly goods.

III.

Our lyres we strike with trembling hands
 And pipe our songs with tearful eyes ;
 Yet 'mid the strains our hungry bands
 Mar rhyme and time with painful cries.
 But if you ask, in harsh surprise,
 "Why thus despair Bohemia's broods?"
 With aching heart each bard replies :
 "We have no store of worldly goods."

Envoi.

O World! we poets ever try
 To cheer you in your doleful moods ;
 Give ear in pity to our cry—
 "We have no store of worldly goods!"

'Twas hardly a ballade calculated to cheer drooping hearts, seeing it dwelt over-much on the misery of such cattle as we; still, it was a severe blow to my pride as a poet to find, at the conclusion of my rhyming, that both Eugene and the signor had sought comfort in slumber. Being thus scornfully rejected even by my fellow-sufferers, I was left to my own devices; so having repeated the verses twice or thrice, to impress them on my fickle memory, I also fell asleep on the hardness of the prison pallet.

O night of dreams and dreariness, what sorrows haunted that dungeon and filled our weary brains with pageants of woeful seeming! No pleasant visions of delight such as—according to poets—charm the slumbers of condemned prisoners; but melancholy shadows, relating old tales of grief and misery. You, madame, on your dainty couch, cannot conceive such midnight horrors; nor you, comfortable Dives, napping at your club, can conjure up

such fearful phantoms of pain which here confounded our uneasy slumbers. Nay, Queen Mab was not with us, I vow; but some sluttish hag, fresh from the Brocken, who called into chimerical existence those tremendous nightmares. In the despairing verse of James Thompson, in the sombre visions of Dante, in the dejected lyrics of Edgar Poe, you will find such melancholic dreams translated into immortal poesy for the comprehension of man; but few have gone those weird journeys into the City of Dreadful Night, and still fewer have dared to reveal what they have seen, lest those who read should shriek in madness at such shadows of terrific seeming. I was glad when the gray morning broke through the barred window, although it but summoned us to the bar of justice.

He was like Shallow, our judge—truly a modern edition of that admirable custalorum, and we speedily saw that an appeal to his common sense would be useless, as he had but scant store of that desirable commodity in his cranium. By the advice of Eugene, we held our peace and let this bald-headed son of Themis—who was as blind as his mother—deal with us as he listed.

We were charged by a lying policeman with being drunk—alack! no malt liquor had passed our lips for twenty-four hours; disorderly—oh, Green Satin, and you escaped free—with breaking the Queen's peace—which I confess we did, but only to preserve our poor gains. To these infamous indictments we all pleaded guilty, as the best way to get out of the scrape into which our nigger minstrelsy had led us; and the Solon of the Bench, saying 'twas our first

offence, let us go free on payment of a nominal fine of one shilling each.

O Poverty! O Despair! O cruel goddess Fortune! Three were we, and a shilling each was the penalty; so, with rage in our hearts, we paid our only three shillings to a well-fed minion of the law, who added insult to injury by saying we had got off lightly. If he had only known that his grasping paw, legally authorized by Justice, had taken our entire fortune! Penniless we had left our garrets—and penniless we returned, with the riddle still before us as to how we could manage to obtain a meal.

First of all we washed ourselves white again and restored the borrowed instruments to their owners; then tackled once more the problem which we had so nearly solved in the previous twenty-four hours. Haggard and worn-out with hunger we all three sat in my attic looking despairingly at one another, when—

“Good Lord!” cried Eugene voraciously; “I smell a mutton-chop.”

“Cooking!” said I ravenously.

“Some one’s a millionaire this morning,” observed the signor, restraining a howl of despair; “I wish he’d ask us to breakfast.”

“Hark!” said Eugene, starting to his feet; “foot-steps approach the door!”

“Open locks whoever knocks!” cried I, in the mad hope that the signor’s wish was about to be realized.

Enter Rax with a smile on his face.

“Oh! by the way, you fellows, I’m much obliged to you for returning my violin in good order. Were you successful last night?”

Our silence was eloquence itself.

“Because,” went on Rax quickly, “Laura paid me five shillings for her last lessons, and I’ve laid out most of it in a good breakfast; so if you three care to join me, why——”

We fell into one another’s arms and, lifting up our voices, wept aloud.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOUL OF THE VIOLIN.

HAD I aught to do with the economy of the universe, I would certainly clip the wings of Father Time daily at mid-day, so as to have it perpetual morning in the world, if only for my own satisfaction. The Lotus-eaters preferred it always afternoon; but I, more given to work than those poetic slug-guards, would ever keep the east flushed crimson, the herbage wet with chill dews, and the inspiriting breath of Dawn constantly blowing the pale mist of night from low-lying plains. In truth I love the freshness of those ante-meridian hours; so full of youth and energy, for then do I feel as merry as the lark, that tuneful minstrel of Aurora whose dew-drenched wings are dried at no meaner fire than that which warms our planet. At noon, however, my spirits begin to go down with the steeds of Helios on the western slopes, and when their splendor vanishes below the verge of earth my brightness also goes with them, and night invariably finds me as melancholy as an owl.

Oh! how I hate those lagging hours of darkness, full of mystery and dreary forebodings, dulling my most beautiful thoughts with some sleepy opiate, and keeping them chained in leaden slumber until Dawn releases them from such dreamless lethargy! No! I am no votary of the nightingale, that lament-

able fowl of dusky thickets, but take for my ideal bird the merry lark, who rises at cockcrow to salute the sun with silvery song and tuneful inspiration.

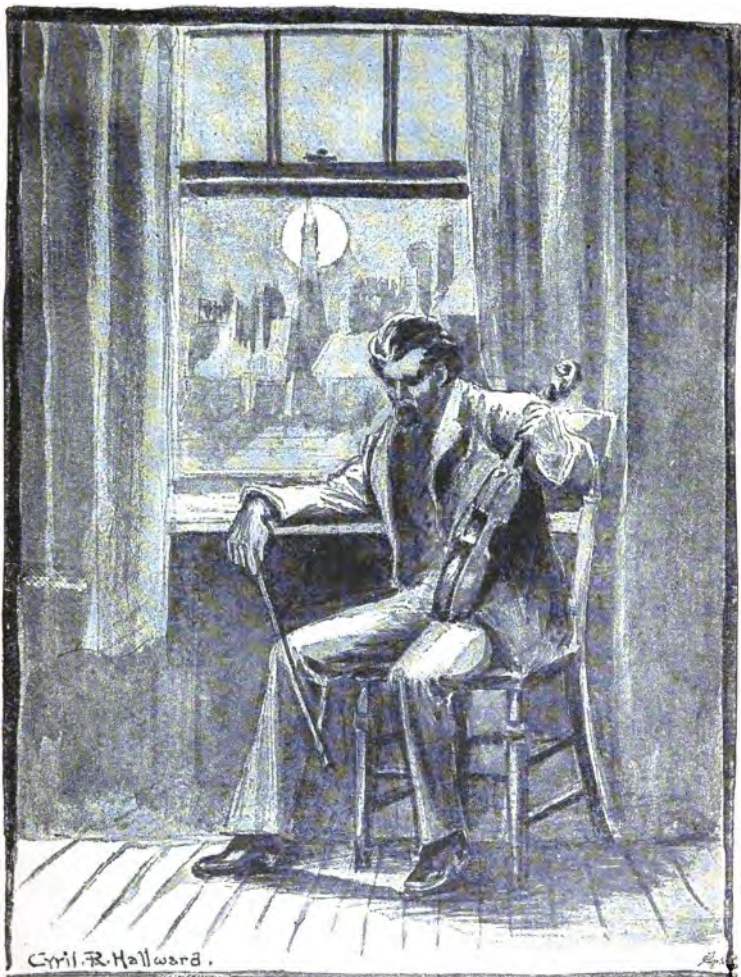
Alas! one cannot always have his desires in this world gratified, therefore in due course comes night and with it my melancholy; so on that evening when I sat mutely in the garret looking out at the rapidly darkening sky, my spirits were as low as a thermometer at freezing point. The pale ghosts of past failures, which I would fain keep sealed up in the sepulchre of forgetfulness, were now abroad, and whispered despondingly in my ears with their constant refrain, "It might have been if——" O cursed interjection! for how many ruined lives have you not been responsible? In that hour of duskiness I could have written elegies, but had not the energy to put pen to paper; I could have recited tragic speeches, but my tongue, paralyzed by melancholy, remained locked within my teeth. I was, to say the least of it, devilish dull; and at my elbow sat Night, in the form of a wan-faced hag crooning old ballads as fearsome as the keening of an Irish Banshee.

'Twas at this moment that I heard the strains of a violin stealing thin and clear through the murky air, soaring upward to my eary like the complaining voice of a fallen angel. So full of pensiveness, so thrilling with pain, I could have wept with pity of myself, such sadness did that music engender in my already dejected soul. I thought of my lack of income, of the difficulties in discovering gold mines in Parnassus, of the tiresomeness of being without candles, and the impossibility of finding rhymes which had not been used before; in short, I thought of

all my ills, physical and mental, which dismal retrospection I put down entirely to that invisible music. Nay, I did not think that some ghost of the past had found voice and was amusing himself by such caterwauling, for well I knew 'twas but Edward Rax combining catgut, horsehair, brain, and fingers to the manufacture of these despairings. He was a wonderful musician, was Rax, but a trifle dreary in his selection of melody, being much given to nocturnes in minor keys, which but ill accord with the mission of music, which I take to be the disperser and not the engenderer of sad thoughts. Perhaps this vein of dreariness stood in the way of his success; for in spite of his undeniable talent and his age—not far short of forty—he had not yet attained the position to which his capabilities as a violinist entitled him, and now, when he should have been charming brilliant audiences at St. James' Hall, was making his instrument weep tears of sound at the open window of an ill-furnished garret.

That Rax had some sad history I was sure, for his pallid face was full of hidden tragedy, and I think these nightly playings were but musical conversations about the past held between his violin and himself. They mourned in company with such painful persistency, that I could willingly have broken the strings of the one and the head of the other if only to put an end to such interminable complainings.

But what a genius the man was—a veritable magician of the bow, who could move his audience to smiles or tears at will. Did you hear that elfish laugh on the chanterelle? 'Tis the mirth of the carnival—that pizzicato daintiness, the showering of



"RAX."

confetti on the upturned faces of revellers—those brilliant chromatic glitterings of notes, the scamperings of Harlequin in pursuit of Columbine—that sudden harmonic, the wild boundings of twirling dancers—at times the mournful cadences of Lenten warnings—again the mellow merriment of a drinking song—and all these shooting out like tongues of fire from a confused medley of shriekings, groanings, skirlings, shoutings, born of the skilful contact of bow and catgut guided to utterance by lissome fingers pressed tremblingly on the vibrating strings. Tra la! tra la! la-la-la! Yes, all Venice lives in that fantastic air, and when Rax played it, 'twas a miracle of sound—so wonderful, indeed, that Aaron, after one of these performances wrote his famous sonnet which appeared in several musical journals unsigned—and unpaid for:

TO EDWARD RAX.

The moan of winds through many a northern land,
The murmur of the melancholy sea,
Wild Philomel's mad passionate minstrelsy,
And stir of streams by sighing breezes fann'd—
All these, united in a various band,
Are chained by silence and are dumbly pent
Within the bosom of thine instrument
Until released to life by thy deft hand.
The tremulous music swells upon the air,
Sobbing and wailing from the quivering strings,
Sinks sadly to the depths of drear despair
Or shrills to ecstasy on stormy wings.
It is thine art which makes this music rare;
At thy command the violin wakes and sings!

“Bur-r-r-h,” said I at length, trying to shake off the influence of such strains, “this ghoulish music will

assuredly drive me out of what little mind I have. 'Twere wiser to go down to this perishing Paganini and ask him to play something more cheerful."

No sooner said than done, and in the space of a few minutes I found myself groping in the darkness outside the door of the musician. The lamentable strains still continued, but mingling with such sadness I heard the sound of sobs, the pain of long-drawn sighs. Sudden terror seized my soul at such pitiful weeping, and I would have fled from this sacred sorrow had I not in the blackness stumbled against the door. The violin ceased, and on being bidden to enter into that House of Tears, I did so somewhat shamefacedly, I confess, as I felt I had surprised a secret which I ought not to have known.

"Ah! 'tis you, Peter," said Rax, recognizing me in the dim light. "Have you come to cheer me with your company?"

"Rather to cheer myself," I answered, seating myself on the bed, for Rax occupied the only chair in the room. "I heard you playing, so thought I would come down and see you for a few minutes. Why don't you play merrier music?"

"There is no instrument that is the voice of the soul so much as the violin, Peter; and if the soul is sad, how can the music be gay? Besides——"

Here he paused suddenly, sighed, and placing his violin beneath his chin, drew from the instrument one long, thin note of infinite pathos.

"Besides?" said I, scenting a history.

"Besides, 'tis Alice who speaks in the violin."

"Alice?"

"Ah! you do not know the story of my life. 'Tis

sad enough truly, dealing as it does with failure and death."

"But Alice!"

"I speak of her: She is dead long years ago; but her soul is here."

He touched the varnished body of the violin caressingly with his long fingers, and I stared at him with a vague surprise, feeling sure that his privations had bred madness in his brain.

"No! I am not mad, most noble Festus," he said, interpreting my look with a wan smile. "You know the story of Paganini, do you not—of his violin, which contained the soul of a woman he loved and murdered. 'Tis the same with me—his story is my story, but I did not kill her—no; she died of consumption!"

"Alice?"

"That is her name. Alice! my beautiful Alice! O my dear one, you that have found heaven after the horrors of this world, how good of you to stay in my violin to cheer my soul!"

Decidedly Rax was light-headed with his mysteries of imprisoned souls and haunted violins; yet in that twilight, which seemed to brood on the borders of another world, I half believed in his fanciful story. Lying on the bed in the clinging darkness—he, sitting by the window, told me the tale of his sorrows, interluding it at times with the eloquent music of the violin, which continued the story when words failed the narrator.

"I might have been great," said Rax, while the violin sounded a piercing note of regret. "Yes, I might have been truly great had I taken the flood

which leads on to Fortune. To all, once in their lifetimes, comes that flood; but on circumstances, as much as on their wills, it depends if they take it or not. Do I regret the loss of those laurels which might have wreathed my brow? No! I do not regret, for what is fame without love? And when Alice died, love died also."

"O sorrow! sorrow!" moaned the violin with weeping regret; "sorrow for the laurel of Fame! the rose of Love—one crowned a lesser genius than thou, the other withered at the chill wind of death."

"Yes, I loved my Alice well. Ah! those were halcyon days when we first met. What cared we for poverty while we had each other? To us the world was bright and gay—we wandered on from January to December, with no season in our lives but golden summer. We loved and kissed, and between our kisses told each other of our love."

"Love! young love!" trilled the violin joyously. "Oh! the passionate beating of youthful hearts—the greenness of trees, the songs of birds—the whole world was full of love, reflected there from your own lives!"

"My father was a musician, you know," continued Rax, laying his instrument across his knees; "he played all instruments, but none of them well. He composed music, but did not know the meaning of thorough bass. One often meets such uncultured geniuses, who would be great if they only had perseverance and ambition. Alas! my poor father had neither the one nor the other; he was content to pass his life as the conductor of a provincial orchestra, in teaching singing—about which he knew nothing,

and in drinking—about which he knew a great deal. As to my mother, she was a weak, mild woman, frail to look at as a saint of Fra Angelico, who constantly repeated the Creed of Good Women: ‘I believe in the Bible. I believe in my husband. I believe in my children.’ Alas! she had but one child in whom to believe, and that was myself. I remember her very well, though I was still young when she died. A delicate, faded face, and a low, soft voice thrilled with melancholy—a woman such as one sees in daguerreotypes only, never in modern photographs. She was neither joyful nor sad—not that her nature was apathetic, but she had long since exhausted the emotions of extremes. As badly as he played on his instruments did my father play on the gamut of her feelings, and she, poor soul, worn out with contention, faded sadly and sweetly out of a world she found too hard for her soft nature. Yes, she is dead, that gentle mother, and the daisies now grow thickly over the swell of her unmarked grave—as thickly almost as they do over the grave of Alice.”

“Alice! Alice!” sighed the violin with tender sadness, “the snows falling on thy grave are less white than was thy soul! There is no stone graven with thy name—’tis inscribed on my heart!”

“I was a born violinist,” continued Rax after a pause; “to play that instrument I was born, and none other ever satisfied me. Had it not been invented, I verily believe I would have brought it into existence so as to find a fit interpreter for the emotions of my soul. You know I rarely play set pieces, but rather improvise and transmit my fancies into

music, which varies with every beat of the heart. That, indeed, has been a great bar to my success; for the public, too unimaginative to follow the caprices of a poet musician, cannot bear such will-o'-the-wisp harmonies. I remember once hearing a great pianist playing Thalberg's 'Home, Sweet Home,' and heard a lady behind me whisper, 'How nice! My little girl plays that.' There is the whole taste of the general public in a nutshell—they like something their little girl plays, so that they can know the right thing to applaud. I, fanciful in my ideas, evoking such phantoms of the brain by bizarre renderings, unexpected chords, capricious passages, am looked upon as a charlatan, a musical Cagliostro; but if I had tied down my genius—oh, I speak advisedly—my genius to the interpreting of things 'my little girl plays,' I should have been called great."

"Isn't that rather an extreme way of looking at it?" I ventured to remark. "The public also like difficult classical music."

"Of the *Op. 42* sort. Yes, they say they do, and probably some speak honestly, but the great mass love the thing 'my little girl plays.' Ah, bah! we are drifting into an argument about art, and I was telling you my life. Let me resume."

He took up the violin and played a little air of infinite sweetness, in which the last note, clear and full as that of a bird, died away on the twilight air.

"It was a woman taught me the violin! Ah! you are astonished, but for my part I cannot help looking upon the violin as a woman's instrument. Women are sympathetic, so are violins, and the combination of the two, to my mind, produces a far greater artist

than when a man interprets. A male violinist, generally speaking, astonishes all by his marvellous technique, but a feminine violinist thrills us by her sympathetic renderings. Of course there are exceptions to this, as to every rule; but depend upon it, the man who is a great violinist has a touch of femininity in his soul. Yes, it was a woman taught me how to play. No! not Alice, but a great artiste called Carmela. She is dead now and forgotten, but she was very great; and all I know I owe to her."

"The dead Carmela!" shrilled the violin in plaintive memory. "She is dead and forgotten. Ah! how soon we forget. Her memory passed with the ceasing of her music. Her violin lies with her in the coffin; its broken strings encircled by a wreath of laurel, faded as her fame. Alas! dead Carmela!"

"But I must hasten my story and tell you about Alice," said Rax more cheerfully. "As I said before, I learned all I know from Carmela, and if she had lived I would doubtless, under her wing, have been able to take my proper place in the platform; but she died, and I, having no influence, was cast adrift. I became very hard up indeed; for my father had also died, and I had no friends. At last, when things seemed to be at their worst, I took an engagement as violinist in an orchestra at a theatre where they were producing light opera, and it was there I met with Alice. She was the prima donna—a charming light-hearted girl, whose voice was silver, whose smile was sunshine."

"Tra la la la," rippled the violin gayly, "how merry she was! How she danced and sang! No bird was so gay or trilled such silvery notes. Tra la la la,

how we all loved her in those days! Oh, the joyous life, the happy time of long ago when Alice smiled! Tra la la la."

"She had two lovers. I was one, and the other



"SHE WAS THE PRIMA DONNA."

was, like me, a violinist in the orchestra. Two lovers—both violinists and both poor. Who was she to choose? Her heart told her to choose me and she

did so; thus I became the lover of Alice. My rival never forgave either of us for that. He was a fine artist, but a bad man; and now when I think of his name, Prandal, it sends a shudder through me."

"Prandal! Prandal!" shrieked the violin angrily. "Coward, coward—thief! You stole my fame—you killed my Alice. O wicked-hearted Prandal!"

"Alice and I were married in due time, and were very happy for many months. I worked in the orchestra, she on the stage, so together we earned a good weekly sum of money; but, alas! like all Bohemians, we lived in the present and thought not of the future. Gayly we danced along the green highway of life, spending our money on simple pleasures. We were so happy, she and I—so happy, that Heaven envied such perfect bliss and my Alice fell ill. She caught a chill in some way, which soon developed into rapid consumption; so she was obliged to leave the stage, and I, in order to attend her, had to give up my post in the orchestra. All our little stock of money went, and I was unable to obtain more. The manager of the theatre was unfriendly with us—the more so, as he also loved Alice, and resented my good fortune in wedding her. So he would give me nothing—would not even let me return to my post in the orchestra. I think Prandal influenced him as well as his own bad feelings; but at all events we were shunned like Pariahs, and left alone in a strange lodging-house—Alice dying, and I with no money to buy her the comforts she needed. At last she died."

"Died!" sobbed the violin. "Died! Alice died! Bring rue—bring rosemary, thyme, and yew—Alice died!"

"Oh, the irony of Fate!" cried Rax, with a cry of anguish; "the irony of Fate! The night she died was the night that I had my only chance of fame—a chance I could not, dare not take—what irony! I knew my only chance of making a name was to appear as a solo violinist, and that chance came. The manager of the theatre got up a series of Sunday concerts, and knowing I was a good player, asked me to give a solo; but that was in the days when we were comparatively friendly. Prandal, who was with the manager when the offer was made, was madly jealous of my good fortune; but I did not care, I was too happy, and hurried home to Alice to tell her of our happiness. Alas! I found her dying, and there was not a morsel of food, not a glass of wine, in the house. It was Saturday, and on the next day the concert was to take place, when I would have money and, I hoped, at least local fame. But she was dying; I saw she could not last out the night unless she had soup and wine and fire. I, alas! had no money to obtain these luxuries."

The violin gave a shriek of despair, and then subsided into low sobbing which chilled my blood, so bitter was the anguish of such lamenting.

"I went to the manager, but he refused to aid me; indeed, I think he repented of his offer to give me a chance, and was glad of my dilemma. I asked every one, even Prandal, for money, but one and all would not give a stiver to help a dying woman! The tradespeople, knowing I was poor, refused to trust me; so here I was, I with a dying wife, an empty cupboard, and despair in my heart. Ah! you think some one would surely have helped me in such

distress; but, alas! human nature hardens itself against misfortune. Besides, my marriage had made enemies of the manager and Prandal, and I think they were pleased it had turned out so badly."

The violin was silent now, but I could hear his labored breath, which told me he was on the verge of tears. Oh, the pitiful story! A genius, this man—a genius, and yet had starved beside his dying wife for lack of worldly charity! At last, with an effort, the poor fellow, recovering himself, began to speak in a low, distinct whisper which stole weirdly through the silence of that chill room.

"I had nothing," he said sadly, "nothing but my violin. All our clothes were pawned, so I did not know how to obtain money for my poor Alice. I did not want to pawn my violin, for without that I could not appear the next day, and if I did not appear I could not hope to get such another chance; so I remained beside the bed and did what I could to comfort Alice. Oh, how she suffered! I would have given kingdoms for food—for soup—for wine; but all hearts were as hard as iron—all pockets were tightly sealed, and we had no hope save in God. I prayed to Him as I never prayed before, as I have never prayed since; but He did not hear me, so in despair, unable to bear the anguish in my wife's eyes, I determined to sacrifice my chance of success and pawn my violin."

"Yes," cried the violin, pitifully. "I was sold for bread! I was your only chance of success; but Alice was dearer to you than fame, so you sold me."

"With the money I obtained," said Rax, quietly, "I bought food and wine, which put new life into

her frail body. I did not tell her what I had done. I could not tell her that I had lost the one chance of my life for her sake; and as she, now stronger for the food, talked so hopefully of the future which would date from my success, that I felt my heart



"I DETERMINED TO SACRIFICE MY CHANCE OF SUCCESS AND PAWN MY VIOLIN."

sink within me. Next day when she was sleeping quietly I stole down to the theatre and tried to borrow a violin for my solo; but alas! I had the same difficulty as I had had with the money. No one would help me, as I think they were all prejudiced

against me by Prandal, and wished to curry favor with the manager by becoming my enemies. At last I had to go to the manager and tell him I could not appear—I had no instrument; and as it was within an hour of the concert, he said Prandal, who was nearly as good a violinist as I, would take my place. I implored the manager to give me a chance, and told him how I had pawned my violin to obtain food for my dying wife. He was as hard as adamant; so I left the theatre, knowing my one chance of success was over.”

“Lost! lost!” wept the violin. “Your hope of fame was lost forever!”

“I could not go back to Alice and tell her of my position, lest the shock should be too much for her frail frame; so I remained at the theatre and heard my rival, Prandal, play the solo which should have been mine. He played it wonderfully, I grant, but not so well as I could have done; and I saw his triumphant glance at me as he retired amid thunders of applause. I could not bear it any longer and left the theatre, but that night gave him the start in life which I hoped to have had. He is famous now, and I——”

“Famous! famous!” lamented the violin bitterly. “He is crowned with laurel, and you—Alice is dead, and you starve in a garret!”

“Oh, the agony of the night when I lost my chance of success! I walked miles and miles and miles in anguish, thinking of my lost laurels, of my triumphant rival, of my dying wife. Then, worn out with agony, I returned and found——”

He could not say the word, but recurred to the

violin and told me what he found—alas! I knew it only too well.

“Dead!” cried the violin mournfully. “Alice



“AT LAST SHE DIED.”

was dead! O fame! O laurels! what are you worth now Alice is dead?”

“After her burial I came to London, and took an engagement in the orchestra where I am now. I did not attempt to gain fame after Alice died, for what was its worth without her to share it? My

violin I managed to get again after great difficulty, and with a subscription started by people whose charity came too late, I went to London. But my violin I did not touch for many weeks—I could not, it reminded me too much of Alice; but when, at length, I summoned up courage to draw the bow across the strings, I knew that Alice was beside me. Her soul, refusing Paradise for my sake, was incarcerated in the violin, and with the sweeping of the bow she spoke to me of her love and of the merry days of old. Ah! you do not believe me. I cannot see your face, but I can guess the cynical smile which wreathes your lips. But it is true! Alice—the soul of Alice is in this instrument. Listen! you will hear her speak!"

The moon had risen, and her pale light poured into the poor room. I could see floods of silver light lying pool-like on the floor, and there, in the stillness, I heard the sudden sweep of the bow as a note, piercing, imploring, anguishing, leaped out from the violin which contained the soul of Alice. All the joys, the sorrows, the hopes, the fears, of the past were in that melody which now surged through the lonely room, and under the influence of that pathetic story I could have sworn the violin was speaking to the broken-hearted man. A thrill of strange notes, a joyous carol of wedding-bells, the gayety of a merry song, the pathos of poverty—all—all rang through that delicate music which arose and fell rippling in sad waves through the chill moonlight room. I could not bear those piercing notes. Rax spoke truly—his violin was not an instrument of wood, but a human soul telling to him, to me, all the woes and

anguish of the past. With a stifled cry of pain, wrung from me by the throbbing of those rich melodies, I fled from the room and flung myself down on my bed in my own garret. Thin and ghost-like sounded the sad strains down below, and I, wrought up to a pitch of poetic frenzy by the strange story, the wild music, and the bitter sorrow of the whole tale, wrote the following poem, which in some measure relieved my overburdened soul :

THE VIOLINIST.

I place my violin 'neath my chin,
 My fingers on the strings,
 The bow awakens music thin
 Which floats on viewless wings.

Oh, rich ! oh, rare the melody
 That stirs the sleeping night !
 The violin wakes and speaks to me,
 Of that long-dead delight.

The music thrills with joy elate,
 Or sobs with keenest pain ;
 Not mine the art to thus create
 Such varied wealth of strain.

It is thy soul, my long-dead bride,
 Within the violin pent :
 To comfort me you now abide
 Within the instrument.

When music trembles from the strings
 Beneath the sweeping bow,
 Thy prisoned soul is freed, and sings
 Of former joy and woe :

Recalls the sunlight on the hill
Green after drenching rains,
Or pallid moonlight gleaming chill
On glitt'ring window-panes :

Of golden day and darksome night
When life had no regret,
Of roses red and roses white
That bloomed when first we met.

I touch anew the quiv'ring string,
And forth the rich notes bound :
Oh sing, imprisoned angel, sing,
Though sorrow springs from sound !

And from below, while penning those hasty verses,
I heard Rax still talking to his dear Alice—heard
the solemn strains of the violin, the voice of the
caged soul, and could almost fancy I saw at the
window a white-robed form floating through the air.
Alas! 'twas but a white cloud veiling the moon—
she was not there, dead Alice: her body rests 'neath
the daisied turf of a quiet churchyard; but her soul,
imprisoned in the violin, kept sighing sadly through
the night until my dreams were full of the mournful
melody of dead delights of past happinesses.

CHAPTER V.

“THESE BE THY GODS, O ISRAEL.”

LIFE is a problem; but how to solve such problem is a problem greater than the problem of life.—See chap. ix., p. 120, “The Phool’s Philosophy,” by Richard Halston.

Why Halston should have published a book expounding such riddles, I can never understand; and still less can I conceive how he managed to get his book into print. Therein, to my mind, lies the greatest problem of all; for that a respectable firm should print, bind, publish, and sell such darksome oracles, is a wonder only to be paralleled by the fact that Halston professed to understand what he had written.

Certainly the above quotation sounds pretty and enigmatic; but what does it mean? I asked the publishers, but they said they had not read the book, as their reader did all that sort of thing; whereupon I went to this reader, who was wrestling with a comic story written by a literary undertaker, and asked him. He replied that people without brains could not understand the saying, even if it were explained to them, and as I—here he became personal, so I left him to his funereal jests and sought out the author. That gentleman smiled in a pitying manner on my ignorance and explained; but the explanation was more obscure than the remark itself, therefore I

gave up the task of elucidating Halston's conundrums in despair; for I know that never, on this side of the grave, will any light be thrown on their darkness.

But the critics declared the book to be a great one; though on what ground they based their argument I do not know—any more than I know how such a literary Chinese puzzle ever came to be published.

Halston said he was a votary of Polyhymnia; but to my mind, judging from his book, he learned from the Sphinx, and a mighty obscure education the beast gave him. Luckily for the world he only wrote the one book; for shortly after its publication he married money in the person of a literary damsel of forty-five, and thereupon left the garret for the drawing-room and the Barmecidian feasts of the Nine for the gross banquets of Lucullus. 'Tis of his marriage and the circumstances which led to such coupling that I propose to speak; for certainly, in turning Mademoiselle Bas-bleu into Mrs. Halston, he accomplished a great victory over a critic, for which valorous deed I would forgive him anything, even the perpetration of such worn-out epigrams as the following:

"A fool is a man not open to conviction."

"The cruellest thing Fate can do is to give us all we ask for."

"Ask nothing of Heaven, if you would be happy."

"The rich are more miserable than the poor."

"Life at its best is dull—at its worst is hopeful."

Decidedly Halston was a student of M. la Rochefoucauld, Lord Chesterfield, and that curious book, "Lacom;" but over their nakedly aggressive aphorisms, which he filched so shamelessly, he threw a decent cloak of mystery; and the result was "The

Phool's Philosophy," which all the world admired and professed to understand.

'Tis no use railing at the moon, and in reputation Halston is as high above me as that planet, still I cannot help recording my conviction that the author of such Delphian mysteries was a humbug and obtained entrance into Bohemia under false pretences. He talked vaguely of helping the world; but the only person I ever saw him help was himself. He lauded the nobility of poverty and was always trying to get rid of such nobility. He said marriage was the sacred union of twin souls, and nullified such declaration by wedding a faded damsel who had not the slightest idea what a soul was, but believed vaguely it had something to do with theosophy. Halston's conversation consisted in copy-book moralities flavored with vile dog-Latin culled from the foreign words and phrases page of the dictionary; and as he said the most astounding things in the gravest manner, he imposed on every one except our Bohemian friends, who saw through his transparent attempt to pose to all as a Carlyle, *cum* Stuart Mill *et* Darwin philosopher.

Where he came from, Heaven only knows; but he was certainly begotten under the planet Mercury, for a more tricky man I never knew, though perhaps, like Becky Sharp, he could be honest on a good income—at all events, he is now making the attempt. Lord! how unjust is Fate! a genius like Rax starves in a garret, while a charlatan of the Halston species flourishes in clubs and Belgravian drawing-rooms.

"She is not pretty, but good," said the philosopher to me one morning while he was making a clean

sweep of my poor breakfast—I never saw such an appetite; “and to be good is better than to be beautiful.”

“And to be rich is better than either,” I remarked, somewhat cynically, it must be confessed.

“She is rich,” assented Halston, filling his capacious



“SHE IS NOT PRETTY, BUT GOOD.”

pipe with my last shred of tobacco; “I want to marry her and use her money for the regeneration of the world.”

“Or for the regeneration of yourself.”

“*Finis coronat opus*,” quoth the philosopher gravely, though he had not the least idea of the meaning of such Latin.

"That remark has nothing to do with the case," I responded impatiently; "why the deuce don't you learn the English of your foreign gems?"

"*Homo sum.*"

"You are, and a precious bad specimen of the race at that. Upon my word, Halston, you are a fraud; I wonder the world doesn't find you out."

"I wish it would," responded this Autolyceus, by which I mean a picker-up of unconsidered literary trifles; "and give me what I want—money."

"Which this damsel you propose to marry possesses?"

"Two thousand a year."

"The deuce! you have stumbled on a gold mine. Is she young?"

"Forty-five."

"Humph! mother and wife in one—what economy!"

"The worst of it is, she has another lover," said Halston, in no wise disturbed by my satire.

"What, two lovers at forty-five? She must be a Ninon de l'Enclos."

"Handsome is as handsome does."

"Oh, confound your copy-book moralities! Who is this other idiot, or lover if you prefer it?"

"A critic."

"A critic?"

"Neither more nor less. He reviews novels, essays, poems, travels, biographies, tracts, histories, fairy tales, and cookery books for *The Weekly Crusher*."

"What a learned man. Does he know anything about such variousness?"

"Yes, he knows everything except how to criticise."

"Lord, and has this animal the right to call better men than himself names?"

"He has, and he does—in print."

"I understand! The critical ass in the lion's skin of the editorial *we*."

"Exactly! *Ite missa*."

"You've been to church lately, I see, and stolen that very inappropriate remark from the Catholic liturgy. Well, now I know your story. You have a chance of marrying this gilded pill, and have a rival who wants to swallow it before you."

"You should have been a lawyer, Peter. Eldon never put a case in a clearer fashion."

"Bosh! Well, and what do you want me to do?"

"Lend me some money—dirty dross—filthy lucre—*regina pecunia*, to carry on the campaign."

I rose from my seat and, leading Halston to the door, gently pushed him outside with a hearty malediction:

"Go away, you weak, foolish, silly man! Gold is never found on mountain tops."

'Twas wrong to do so, I know; but the temptation was too great to be resisted, so as he was balancing his angular frame on the landing I gave him a push, and, like Daddy Longlegs, he fell down the stairs. Perhaps the bumps, of which I counted five distinct ones on five distinct stairs, knocked some sense into his cranium; or perhaps such blows damaged his philosophical knowledge-box of bad Latin, copy-book maxims, and heterogeneous cullings from Herbert Spencer and Co.; but I know that 'twas fully a week before I set eyes on our Socrates again.

When I did see him the untidy Socrates had changed, by some pecuniary process only known to himself, into the spruce Alcibiades. He possessed a new suit of clothes, distinctly West-end in cut; his shaggy beard had given place to a clean-shaven chin and a neat little moustache of the dandy order, while he actually wore gloves and patent-leather shoes of



"THIS A PHILOSOPHER!"

extraordinary brightness. This a philosopher! this a despiser of social matters and sartorial requirements! Perish the thought, for never peacock was finer in plumage, and I actually caught a whiff of perfume, which showed me plainly that such a man was lost to Bohemia for ever. We tolerate no oiled and curled Assyrian bulls. We despise such gaudy tulips, giving forth borrowed odors. We know nothing of gloves, patent-leather boots, gardenias, and such like gear. They exist, but not for us; they dazzle, but not our eyes; therefore I saw that Richard Halston, philosopher and humbug, was on his way from the desolate city of Prague. Yet I will say that he looked better for the change—younger and

less gloomy: so, in spite of my distaste for this Beau Brummel of Bohemia, I made him welcome, till the wretch actually had the presumption to produce a cigarette! 'Twas the last straw added to the load of clothes, scents, insolence, and complacency with which he was crushing me; so, finding the English tongue insufficient to express my wrath I took to Latin and quoted the Venusian:

"Persicos odi, puer, apparatus; displicent nexæ philyra coronæ."

The poor animal shook with fear, thinking, in his shameless ignorance of the Latin tongue he so frequently misused, that I was calling down curses on his freshly oiled head.

"Why, what's the matter, Peter?" he stammered, removing that odious roll of scented tobacco from his mouth. "I thought you would be pleased to see me."

"Out, puff-box, out!"

"Oh! you needn't get angry about my clothes," he said, resuming his chair and his cigarette; "they are all paid for."

"The deuce! This honesty needs looking into. A man who can so recklessly pay for a suit of clothes without taking a year's credit, is not worthy of the name of Bohemian. Whence this opulence, Richard?"

"My book!"

"What! your tailor took it in payment of his account? Go, shameless one! He could never read it, and wouldn't understand it if he did read it."

"*Vive la bagatelle!*" said Halston, misquoting and misusing French as more in keeping with his

fine feathers than Latin. "I've sold my book to a publisher."

I lighted my one candle to look at the man who had actually sold a book to a publisher, and been paid.

"Was he quite sane?"

"What, the publisher? Oh yes! he took the book on the recommendation of his reader."

"That reader is on a fair way to Hanwell, Richard. Well, I congratulate you on having the book taken up; but I cannot congratulate the publisher or the public."

"Bah, Peter! Envy is a detestable vice."

"So it is; and you resemble Envy. But why spend money wrung from a poor publisher on such raiment?"

"Can't you guess?"

In saying this short sentence he looked so bashful, coy and silly, that I did guess.

"Ho! ho! In the springtime the male bird puts on finer plumage, in order to attract the attention of the female."

"You are right," said the philosopher-dandy, admiring his boots. "Lavina has almost said, 'Yes.'"

"And what prevents Lavina saying it entirely?"

"The critic."

"Oh! the other gentleman, so fond of the antique. But surely these garments, these tinkling ornaments, these visible signs of opulence, can stand against the attractions of a critic?"

"I can't say; but I'm determined to marry Lavina, so I have an idea."

"Eh! I thought you had put all that ware in your book. Well, and your idea?"

"'Tis to crush this presumptuous ink-slinger; but you must help me."

"I'll do anything to harm a critic."

Halston grasped my arm with tears in his eyes, and proposed to send out for beer, in order to discuss the matter more hospitably. We summoned Mrs. Prass, who was hovering round the upper regions collecting rents—which task was so much lost time to her—and commanded two bottles of Bass. It appeared speedily, Mrs. Prass having a friend in the public-way round the corner; and having given Halston my one glass, I filled a cup for my own drinking. I had misjudged the man. One who could produce tears and beer at will must have some good in him, in spite of his appearance being so much against him, so I prepared to listen kindly to his plans, and aid him, if I possibly could, in punishing the common enemy of all authors.

"Lavina," said Halston with an obvious effort, "has written a book."

"Of course; all women write books. It's in three volumes, isn't it?—about a man in the army and a girl in society—a mixture of theosophy, society, fashion, dressmaker talk, and bad grammar, entitled, 'He Never Told His Love.'"

"Yes, something of that sort. I've read it."

"My poor fellow! and you survived three volumes of scratchy handwriting?"

"It was awful," groaned the martyr, taking a drink of beer to sustain him. "There's a girl in it that flings her milk-white arms round the hero's

neck every second page. Half of it is made up of quotations from erotic poets, mostly Swinburne; description of a fox-hunt, all wrong; two wedding trousseaux, described at full length; and dances, dimly lighted conservatories, passionate farewells, beauty men, and all that twaddle."

"Why, it's worse than your philosophy business."

"Don't joke, Peter! it's a very serious subject to me."

"The reading of it?"

"No, the publication."

"You don't mean to say she's going to inflict that stuff on the long-suffering public?"

"Rather! I've arranged it all: she pays for the publication."

"Oh! and you get a commission from the publisher?"

Halston smiled uneasily, saying neither "yea" nor "nay" to such accusation; but I shrewdly suspected my chance shot had hit the mark.

"She does not want to publish it under her own name," he said after a pause, "and no one knows it is written except me, so I advised her to bring it out under a masculine *nom de plume*, like George Eliot."

"And the *nom de plume*?"

"Richard Hallam."

"Humph! Very like Richard Halston."

"Exactly," cried Halston eagerly; "that's the very point. This critic—his name is Berry—hates me like poison, so I'm going to let him think the book is mine."

"In which case he'll slate it like blazes in *The Weekly Crusher*."

"Of course he will. Then I'll show the review to Lavina, and tell her Berry wrote it; that will settle him, I think."

"You mean, she'll throw him over and marry you?"

"Yes."

"'Tis a good idea, Signor Machiavelli, and will no doubt turn out to your advantage; but what do you want me to do?"

"Persuade Berry that I wrote it. I'll bring him up here to-night."

"Capital! I'll ask Eugene, Aaron, and a few others. They would like to see a real live critic, and hear him lying; but I've no money for the entertainment?"

"Here is half-a-sovereign."

"Good! I'll lay it out in beer and tobacco. By the way, what is the title of the book?"

"I Cannot Bear to Say Farewell: or, Oh, My Heart is Far Away!"

"The deuce! Is that all? Why isn't it longer?"

"Couldn't get any more words into the title-page. But now you understand my little scheme, I will go. *Vale! Pax vobiscum.*"

"You're at it again! I wish you'd stop these primitive quotations. Don't forget to bring the critic to-night. We'll roast the 'Berry' properly."

"*Nunc dimittis*," said Halston, and vanished through the door, just in time to escape a well-aimed boot.

If a man does know Latin well, 'tis an insult to his less learned friends to incessantly parade his superior knowledge before them; and if he is ignor-

ant of the language, 'tis ten times worse misquoting Horace, massacreing Virgil, and making mince-meat of the verbs, tenses, and ideas of Martial. I was sorry that boot missed Halston; it might have knocked some of his dictionary Latin out of his head.

The night came, and with it Eugene and Aaron, both agog with excitement to see that ferocious beast, the critic. As I had spent Halston's ten shillings royally in festive preparations, the two Bohemians thought they had made a mistake, and dropped into the Guildhall during a Lord Mayor's banquet. They could not convince themselves that they were awake, and we drank two bottles of beer between us to solve the question. Afterward Eugene counted the bottles to see how many were left; and Aaron regretted that we had not a footman to open the door to our swell company.

"Halston is late," said I, observing the moon—my only clock. "I hope he has not fallen out with the critic, and slain him on the way."

"'Twill take the trouble off our shoulders," remarked Aaron complacently; "we are sure to kill him before the night is over."

"Hush!" whispered Eugene in a melodramatic fashion; "they come. I can hear the critic swearing at the steepness of the stairs."

The great man, heralded by Halston, entered, and we all received him with effusive joy—why, I don't know, as we certainly had but little love for literary butchers.

I resolved to read him my poems; Aaron hinted he might be induced to give a rapid sketch of his poetical comedy in five acts; and Eugene borrowed a

candle from me to illuminate his studio, in case the critic wanted to see his great picture, which was extremely unlikely. Very chilly was that critic at first, and a trifle uneasy at being alone with four blood-thirsty Bohemians; but we thawed him with beer, whereupon he began to talk shop, and we discovered



“WE ALL RECEIVED HIM WITH EFFUSIVE JOY.”

he was a supercilious beast. I do not deny that he was possessed of a certain amount of brains, but he certainly did not give us a fair sample of their quality—at least, I hope it was not a fair sample—if only for the sake of *The Weekly Crusher*.

“I suppose all you fellows are going to set the Thames on fire?”

"Well, I don't know," said Eugene modestly. "We are going to try very hard to do so, but whether we shall be successful is quite another thing."

"Ah! yes," replied Berry encouragingly; "nine men out of ten fail. If you only knew the number of men I have advised to give up literature, but they won't. They go on writing novels——"

"And you go on reviewing them?" finished I, gravely.

"Of course! I like to help the rising talent, you know: show them how to improve their works, point out their faults, and tell them if they have repeated the ideas of other people."

"How fond the rising talent must be of you!"

"Quite the reverse," said Berry, smiling; "they think I am very hard on them, which is a mistake. I could be far harder if I chose."

"I'm sure you could," murmured Aaron, under his breath.

"If I said nothing but nice things about authors they would not improve," pursued Berry, with great candor. "What we critics desire is perfect workmanship."

"With original ideas?"

"Of course! of course! Perfect workmanship without originality is like a beautiful woman with no brains; but original ideas are so rare nowadays. I am always saying that in my paper about numbers of authors."

"I hope the authors are grateful?"

"Not a bit of it," cried Berry wrathfully. "Why, you know Burdle, the novelist?"

"Oh yes!—a great writer."



"A great thief, you mean! Well, the leading idea of his last book struck me as familiar; and I actually took the trouble to find out where he had obtained it, and gave him a slashing review—full of kind advice—in which I pointed out his lack of originality. But he was not a bit grateful for all my trouble: wrote to my editor, and called me all kinds of names. That is all the thanks we critics get."

"What a shame!" said Eugene ironically; "you are very much maligned."

"We are! we are!" cried Berry emphatically. "A critic is the author's best friend, only authors don't know it."

"How do you expect them to know it," grumbled Aaron reproachfully, "when you hide your kindly feelings under abusive language?"

"I don't want to use abusive language," said Berry mildly; "but it is my business to correct errors, and to show authors how they ought to avoid mistakes."

"Have you ever written a novel, Mr. Berry?"

"No; only short stories."

"Then how can you possibly advise on a subject of which you know nothing?"

"A man may not be able to make a table, yet he can point out the faults to a carpenter. I think Dr. Johnson says that."

"Oh, Dr. Johnson was a critic, and of course defended the craft; besides, I'm not so very sure as to the truth of that remark. But I ask you, Mr. Berry, why is it, for once in a way, you don't pick out a few virtues in some novel?"

"So we do, when we find any; but when you have

to review a baker's-dozen of novels a week, you haven't much time to find out the beauties."

"Oh, I see! you scamp your work?"

"Well, not exactly that," said Berry apologetically; "but we read novels as carefully as we can, and give them——"

"Your hastily formed judgments?"

"'Tis the fault of the century. Reviews have to be done at railroad speed, like everything else."

"You critics always put me in mind of Keats' lines," observed Aaron deliberately:

"Half ignorant, they turned an easy wheel
That set sharp racks at work to pinch and peel."

"Pardon me, I hardly understand."

"Oh! you want it in prose? Well, I mean that in your careless criticisms of books you don't know the harm you do. What's fun to you is death to the author. Blame bad work by all means, but praise good writing; and don't crush a book unmercifully without reading it."

"Oh, I assure you I read all the books sent to me for review—at least a dozen a week—and I give my candid opinion on the contents."

"Confoundedly candid," growled Eugene.

"Now if you sent a book of poems to me for review," said Berry, still addressing Aaron, "I would read it carefully, and do my best to show you how you could improve your verses."

"I'm sure you would," said Aaron viciously. "Of course you are fond of poetry?"

"Well, no; I hardly ever read it, unless a volume is sent to me for review."

"Oh, I see! you keep your mind clear from all other influences, so as to give a sound judgment."

"Exactly," said the critic, taking the ironical remark for sober earnest. "Of course, reading the great poets prejudices a man against the trash written nowadays."

By this time we all felt we wanted to murder this egotistical horror—not behave unkindly to him, but just throw him out of the window, heave a brick at his head, or pay him some little attention of that sort. However, we all swore silently under our breaths, smiled weakly, and restrained our wrath.

"You have been a critic a long time, I suppose?" asked Eugene, breaking a painful silence.

"Oh yes! quite six years."

"By Jove!" said I admiringly; "fancy being able to criticise works by the cleverest men of the day with only six years' experience! It's wonderful!"

"Oh, it's easy enough when you know how to do it," said Berry innocently.

"But you've got to know it fust!" cried Eugene vulgarly.

Eugene is vulgar at times, polished gentleman though he is innately; but I think the presence of Berry had a good deal to do with this quotation from the music halls. The critic smiled as though he recognized an old friend in the remark, and affably took another glass of beer.

"By the way," said I gayly, "you doubtless know that Halston has written a novel?"

"No! has he?" cried Berry vivaciously, seeing an opportunity of getting his rival under his claws. "I

had no idea you dabbled in light literature, Halston. May I ask the name of your publication?"

"I Cannot Bear to Say Farewell: or, Oh, My Heart is Far Away."

"What! that rub—I mean, that book! I saw it in the office yesterday; so I suppose I must write you a review about it?"

"No! will you?" said Halston, with apparent delight. "How good of you, Berry! It's my first book, you know, so don't be too hard."

"Oh, not at all! I'll take that fact into consideration, you may be sure."

There was such a malignant gleam in his eye, that I chuckled at the thought of the coming woes of Lavina; and Aaron feelingly quoted Holy Writ: "Oh, that mine enemy would write a book!"

I never saw such a full sense of contentment as was expressed on the face of that critic. He felt that his rival was now within his power, and we could all see he was determined to make it hot for him.

"The deuce!" murmured Halston, seeing this indecent joy. "I'm sorry for Lavina; she'll kill him when she reads his 'Massacre of the Innocents.'"

"I cannot bear to say farewell," said Berry in ecstasy.

"Oh! must you go?" we all cried, rising to our feet; for now that we had accomplished our object, we determined to get him out of the place at any price.

"I meant the book," he said, somewhat taken aback; but seeing that we still stood, he also arose to go.

"Well, I really must be off," he observed, putting

on his overcoat; for the man had an overcoat bought out of his ill-gotten gains, but we had none—not even one between us.

A sigh of relief from the entire company, and then a full chorus:

“Have another glass of beer?”

“Wrap up well; the night is cold.”

“Take a pipe of tobacco.”

“Mind the last step—it’s broken.”

At last we hustled him down the stairs, fervently hoping he would break his critical neck; and when the door was closed, began to talk kindly about him—all except Halston, who danced a vivacious ballet of delight.

“So that’s a critic!”

“These be thy gods, O Israel!”

“Not mine,” said Aaron, who, being a Jew, thought the remark applied especially to him. “I wouldn’t have him at a gift.”

“He’ll have your poems at a gift some day,” prophesied Eugene gloomily; “and then you’ll have a bad time of it.”

“I invite you all to my wedding,” said Halston in a dignified tone. “The overthrow of my rival is now a foregone conclusion. *Væ victis.*”

We had put up with the critic, but we could not put up with Halston’s Latin; so with one accord we all fell on him, and knocked what little breath he had out of his body. Having thus reduced him to silence, we refreshed him with beer and sent him down to his room, with instructions to go to bed and dream of Lavina’s gray head encircled with orange-blossoms.

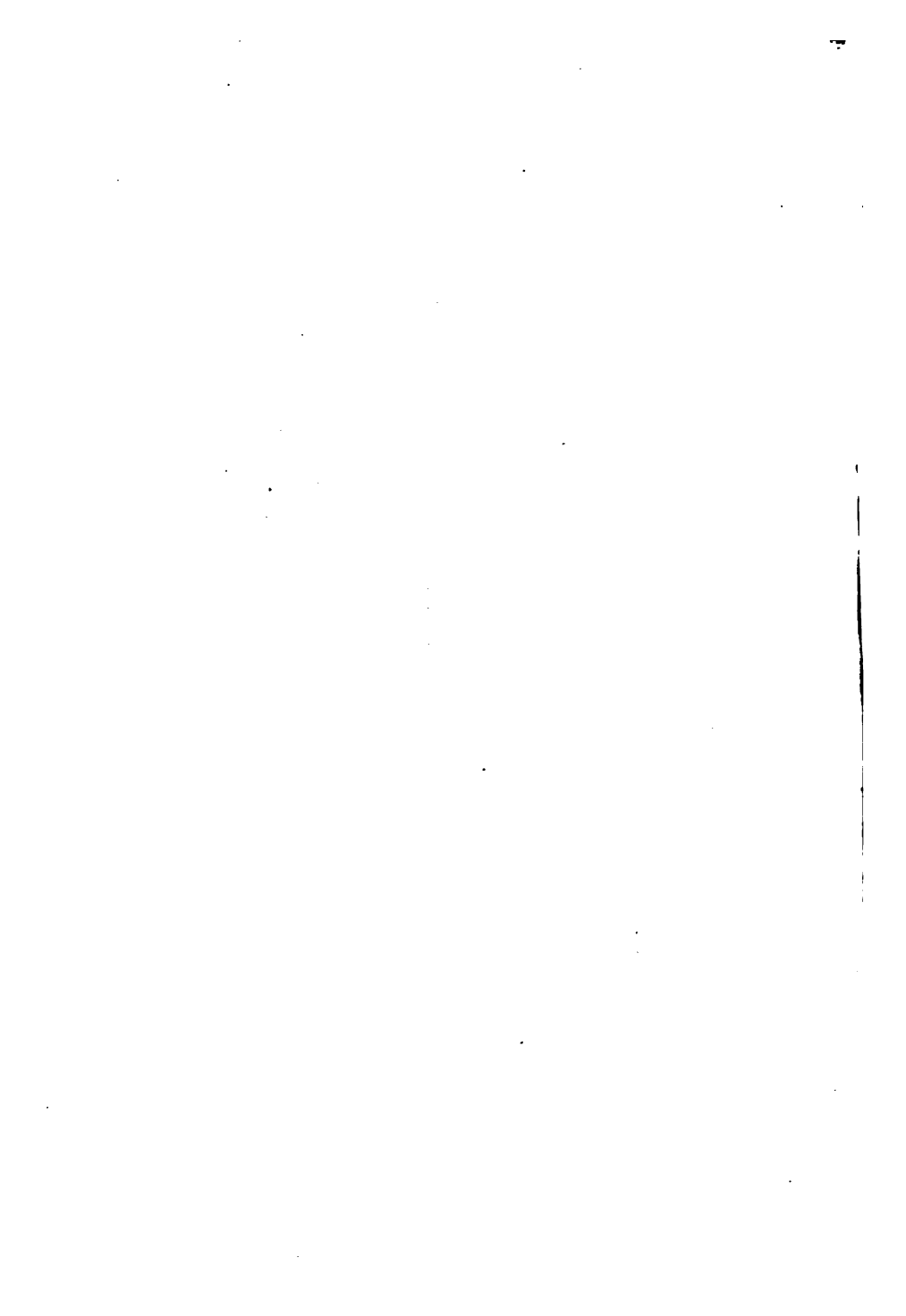
A week after this the storm burst, and, with tears of delight in his eyes, Halston read to us the famous criticism of "I Cannot Bear to Say Farewell." Talk about the *Quarterly* so "savage and tartarly," by the shade of Gifford! this review outdid the most scathing criticisms that ever appeared in that famous magazine. It smote the book hip and thigh, showed up its flimsy scribblings in the most cruel way, jeered at the pathetic bits, pitied the attempts at humor, and finally said a superior housemaid could have written better. Halston declaimed it in fine pulpit style, and we all sat and roared at the innocent way in which Berry was damning himself in the eyes of Lavina; but I was sorry for that elderly Corinna. On reading such a savage onslaught on her poor little attempt at fiction, her gray hair must have curled with wrath; and I doubt not that floods of tears washed away all the rouge from her sallow cheeks. Having finished the reading, Halston put the paper in his pocket with the intention of seeing Lavina and exposing Berry's treachery; but as he left I earnestly impressed on him the necessity of buying a bottle of smelling-salts, so as to be fully prepared for Lavina's certain fit of hysterics.

In the afternoon he returned more jubilant than ever, and I hastily called up Eugene and Aaron to hear the last act of this comedy, which proved to be the most dramatic of all, and decidedly the most amusing.

"When I got to Lavina's house," said Halston, trying to suppress his laughter, "I heard shrieks in the drawing-room, so I knew Lavina had read the review; but mingling with such shrieks I heard bad



LAVINA'S WRATH.



language, and on entering the room found Berry pinned up in a corner by Lavina, who was pecking him with all the movable articles she could lay her hands on. It appears that in order to finish me off in Lavina's eyes Berry had taken his article to her to read, and gave her the whole of it with the addition of a few remarks of his own. When he finished crushing me, as he thought, he looked at Lavina for applause, and got it in the form of the whole three volumes of the book being at his head. Two missed him, but the third caught him under the jaw; and while he was howling with pain, Lavina told him she had written the book. He saw that his chance of marriage was all up, and reading murder in her eye tried to get out of the room—either by the door or window, he was not at all particular. Then Lavina began to throw the furniture about; and when I arrived Berry was almost hidden under a pile of books, plants, wax-flowers, foot-stools, cushions, antimacassars; and such-like things. When Lavina saw me she rushed at me like a wild Indian, and whooped out that if I horsewhipped the man who had abused her book she would marry me; so in order to make the promise binding, I took all that remained of Berry out of the room and thrashed him till my arm ached. Having thrown him out of the door I returned to Lavina, who was in strong hysterics; but having smelling-salts, bought for the purpose, I soon brought her round. When she came to she embraced me, called me her hero, her preserver, and all sorts of nice names, vowing to marry me at once. I told her I would give her Berry's head as a wedding present; and having sent her to

bed—which was about the only place she was fit for—I came here to tell you all about it. *Amor vincit omnes.*”

“It certainly conquered Berry,” said I thoughtfully. “Where is he?”

“Where is it, you mean!” replied Halston scornfully. “Berry is no longer a man; he’s a collection of weals and woes, which I think is either at the undertaker’s or the doctor’s.”

“And your wedding?” asked Eugene, in great glee.

“Takes place next week. I invite you all. *Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates.*”

Well, the philosopher is married now to his withered Corinna, and dwells no more in Bohemia. Berry tried to prove the truth of the matter, but Aaron, I, and Eugene all swore exactly opposite to what he stated; so, as it was three to one, Lavina believed her Richard and became Mrs. Philosopher Halston. The famous book of philosophy came out, and was much praised for its great learning by the critics, though Berry tried to run it down in *The Weekly Crusher*; but his editor, seeing the press were all in favor of Halston, said Berry could not write criticisms, suppressed his article, and gave him his walking-ticket. Where the poor animal is now I know not, but Halston dwells in Philistia in wedded bliss, and does nothing but eat, drink, and make merry, thereby acting directly in opposition to the noble sayings of his book—all of which proves what a humbug the man is. Q. E. D.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DRAMA OF THE FUTURE.

"PETER!" said Mark Trevenna to me one Sunday morning, when we were breakfasting—by invitation—with Julius Dansford, "what was it the Athenians were always crying for?"

"Something new; *videlicet* the Acts, chapter xvii."

"Ah! I thought so. Well, that is exactly what the Londoners of to-day are doing."

"Excellent historical parallel, and one which goes without speaking. Humanity, like a spoilt child, is never satisfied; it is always getting new toys and breaking them out of sheer *ennui*, after doing which it asks for more new toys and repeats the operation."

"That is so," sighed Mark, returning to his breakfast; "but humanity never gets any absolutely new toys. There is nothing new under the sun, not even this egg, which was certainly laid by a conservative hen who believed in the yolk of feudalism."

"You are philosophic to-day, my Garrick," said our host. Garrick was the name we gave our would-be actor. "What makes you repeat such parrot phrases?"

"Because I am getting tired of lentils and yearn for the flesh-pots of Egypt. In other words, utility man at The Siddons is not the summit of my ambition, and I want to make a name."

"Likewise money?"

"Of course; but that always comes with a name."

"I'm not so sure about that. Witness many celebrated men who could not pay their tradesmen."

"Quite right! tradesmen should never be paid. It encourages avarice."

"Mark, don't bring your University code of morals here."

"There!" cried Mark, with a sudden burst of bitterness, "the University—of course you mention the University. Because I've been an unworthy scholar of Alma Mater, all my relatives expect me to become great."

"I'm not a relative," said Julius mildly, "and therefore expect nothing. As to your becoming great, you've become nothing, as far as I know, except bankrupt."

"That's the fault of my creditors. Why should people camp on my doorstep and call me names? Why should they send me letters beginning 'Unless, etc.'? I don't worry them, so why should they worry me? It's ridiculous a fellow having to wear clothes for decency, when he can't pay for so much as a figleaf. Oh, I wish I were a savage!"

"You are! I never heard such bloodthirsty remarks. They undermine the whole basis of civilized society."

"I wish they would. I'd like to see a revolution and a war, and a general upset of everything and every one."

"Amiable youth! and why?"

"Because I'm sick of being utility man at The Siddons."

"From small events what mighty causes spring!"

Julius quoted the saying so solemnly that we all three, much provoked to mirth thereby, burst out laughing, and Garrick's fit of bad temper vanished in the general hilarity.

He was a clever youth, whose parents were very well off; but there was some quirk in his brain which made him deviate from the hard-and-fast line of life they laid down for his following. According to their ideas, he was to go to Eton, thence migrate in adolescence to Oxford, leave Alma Mater for *Themis*, and ultimately end as Lord Chief Justice or Lord Chancellor—it mattered not which—to the great glory of his begetters. This dream of parental ambition, however, was realized only in part; for Mark Trevenna—which, by the way, was not his real name—went to Eton certainly; he even got as far as Oxford; but here he went off at a tangent and took the narrow lane which leadeth to Bohemia, instead of trudging respectably along the highway, blue bag in hand, on his way to the Woolsack. Having been rusticated at Oxford for some boyish freak, he returned home; but his Roman parent did not kill the fatted calf for this prodigal son. On the contrary, he railed considerably at such disreputable conduct; whereupon Mark retorted in *Cambyses'* vein, and was finally turned out of the house by his exasperated sire. Being thus without a home he came, like every one else, to London, found shelter under the hospitable roof of Mrs. Prass, and took up the trade of mumming at *The Siddons Theatre*, in order to pay his weekly rent.

There was something very lovable about Mark, in

spite of his fits of bad temper, which waxed and waned in strict accordance with the variabilities of his fortune; and he was a great favorite with our Bohemians, particularly with Julius, who was accustomed to consult him—as a man of six months' stage experience—about entrances, exits, tableaux, plots, acts, character, and such-like matters of play-writing. Mark's temper always indicated like a moral thermometer the state of his mind, and as on this particular morning he was remarkably cross, I judged that either his liver was out of order or else something had gone wrong with his fortune, therefore judged it advisable to minister unto this mind diseased and dose him with that excessively cheap and nasty medicine, advice. The moral thermometer was at boiling-point of rage; so I strove to banter him into a better humor and lower the temperature by chilly speeches.

“Garrick, my tragedian,” said I in a flattering tone, “we have been as discursive as Praed's Vicar; for we began with the Athenians and ended with the Socialists. Perhaps, therefore, you will hark back to your opening remark anent ‘something new,’ and tell us what you are driving at.”

“I want to make a sensation.”

“Then start a new religion.”

“I am in earnest, Peter.”

“Ditto, Mark! If you want to make a sensation, start a new religion and we will call you St. Mark the Second. Go into the streets and preach any doctrine you like, the more ridiculous the better—such as the transmigration of souls, the end of the world, the religion of symbols—what you please, only let it

be hot and strong and law-breaking; then you will get an audience and followers."

"Yes, and six months in jail for such law-breaking!"

"Not as a criminal—as a martyr! Every religion has its martyrs."

"Thank you, I don't like playing with fire—particularly of the infernal sort. Suggest something easier."

"Act in one of my plays," said Julius, with all the conceit of an unacted playwright.

"Which of them? 'The King's Mistress,' your tragedy; 'The Pretty Puritan,' your restoration comedy; 'Naughty Don Juan,' your burlesque; 'His Last Gasp,' your very mellow melodrama; 'My Wife's Aunt,' your farcical comedy; 'Peter's Wife's Mother,' your miracle play? Which of them?"

"Any one you please, provided you get it acted and pay me the fees. All are great works."

"Yes, but the ideas are old."

"What matter, if the plays are new?"

"New as the stars," retorted Mark ironically.

"What of your blank-verse cribbed from William Shakespeare?"



"I WANT TO MAKE A SENSATION."

Whereupon he spouted a lengthy speech from "The King's Mistress," to which Julius listened approvingly:

"I hesitate! but wherefore hesitate?
 The way is clear which leads to my desire,
 And if 'tis miry with a sin or so—
 Why, we poor souls can scarcely hope to be
 As pure at death as when we entered life;
 I'll not delay! A woman's virtue! Tush!
 'Tis but a foolish thing of man's invention.
 Her loss is gain to me—if it be loss
 To rule a nation through a weak-willed king.
 No! no! I will not hesitate! Alack!
 My monkish soul is still too delicate;
 The gown i' the cloister clings too close to me;
 So I must rend it off, else it will clog
 Those spreading wings, which do aspire to dare
 That mountain peak of Fame where laurels grow,
 To wreath the brows of bold adventurers."

"Now I don't call that bad at all," said Julius, with all the pride of an author who can measure his blank verse by his ten fingers; "it might be worse."

"True, O king! and it might be better."

"Well, well! We can't all be Shakespeares."

"Lord! I hope not. A world of Shakespeares would be too awful. Fancy talking blank-verse after the manner of Hamlet:

"Out! out, damned tailor! Pay your bill forsooth,
 And this poor suit of most indecent cut
 Worn only six short months! Why, look ye, sir,
 These trousers scarce are baggy at the knees,
 And yet you ask for something on account.
 Away, old Snip! I'll pay thee not a cent;
 But lest thou fear I have no love of thee,
 I'll give thee orders—for another suit!"

“Gad! I’ll send that to my raiment makers; ’twill frighten what they are pleased to call their souls out of their three several bodies.”

“I wish you’d stop giving us second-hand Shakespeare,” cried I, weary of such fooling; “you want to make a sensation, Garrick? Well then, make it.”

“What! bricks without straw. Perdition!”

“Which will certainly be your lot if you indulge in such foolish sayings. Hearken unto the words of wisdom, thou dull mortal. Nowadays, as we all agreed some time since, the Londoners want something new for entertainment and distraction. This is the craze age and every year has its special mania, as well as its regular divorce case. Long ago we had æstheticism and the cult of the sunflower, when every one went about in a touzled condition and fell into angular attitudes like so many problems of Euclid. Afterward, Gilbert and Sullivan discovered that the Mikado of Japan was a musical humorist, whereupon we all became more Japanese than the Chrysanthemum land itself. Later on some wiseacres, not satisfied with English brains, hunted up one Ibsen, who has maligned his species in several scientific plays, and we rushed to see moral monstrosities analyze their nasty diseases on the stage. Mixed with these standard fads we have had many minor manias, such as Ritualism, American Girls, Slumming, Thought reading, Spiritualism, Society ballet dancing, Mummer worship, Theosophy, with intervals of Jingoism and proposals to abolish the House of Lords. All these delightful cranks of the brain have been read about, talked about, raved about, discussed, abused, praised, and worried by all

the world—of course the *fin de siècle* world of London. Now, however, the quidnuncs are in search of novelty. Well, give it them in the shape of the Drama of the Future.”

“Which is to consist of what?”

“Anything! Everything! so long as it is in direct opposition to all we now see, think, and do.”

Mark, who had been walking up and down during this tirade, suddenly collapsed under the immensity of thought it suggested, and sat down with a gasp.

“I’m not equal to it, Julius.”

Know ye all men by these presents, that with the hour comes the man. Ten o’clock A.M. was the hour, Julius Dansford was the man; and the outcome of such conjunction—well, for my part, I hardy think it respectable to play foolish jokes on the public, and why they should have swallowed this camel of a joke is more than I, or any one else, can make out. Men are but blind puppies, one and all, I vow; for gnat or camel they swallow, ignorant of the size of such beasts, until some bystander—of course a critic—describes the magnitude or parvitude of the pill. As for the Drama of the Future, Julius sat silent for a few minutes thinking deepy, nor did we dare to break the sacred silence, for the Muse was with him; a satirical damsel I wot, seeing she inspired him to the following irrelevances:

She was a girl, I was a youth;

We were aristocrats.

Both of us searched for the sacred truth,

Blind as proverbial bats.

Our lungs were both of abnormal strength;

We spouted speeches of wondrous length

Of music and morals, the submerged tenth,

Swallowing camels and gnats.



THE DRAMA OF THE FUTURE—THE HATCHING.

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I was a youth, she was a girl;
 Light filled our eyes from above;
 We conversed low, with a gentle purl
 Soft as the coo of a dove.
 The submerged tenth soon we left behind,
 For music and morals were little inclined;
 And found what we never expected to find,
 That life at its best—is Love!

“A mysterious song and sung lustily out of tune,” said I, fairly vexed at this piping of abstruse numbers; “but what is it?”

“The song?” observed the bard complacently; “*Voilà, messieurs!* the plot of The Drama of the Future.”

“*Music and Morals*, Rev. H. R. Haweis. *The Submerged Tenth*, General Booth. *Love*, no known author. Julius, my friend, you’re madder to-day than usual.”

“Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord!”

“Irreverent wretch, stop quoting the liturgy and talk sense.”

“Which is as much as to say the liturgy is nonsense. But upon my word, Peter, I am serious.”

“Julius, your verses are *vox et præterita nihil.*”

“Be dumb, Thersites.”

During this passage of arms Mark sat silent, from sheer amazement, being quite unable to determine which of us was ripest for Colney Hatch; on observing which Julius left his poetry for prose and talked—I will not say sense; but he talked.

“You remarked, Peter, that The Drama of the Future, which, by the way, is a large name for a small thing, should consist of everything in direct

opposition to what we now accept. So be it! I go on those lines. We have had the moral melodrama, the immoral comedy, the legitimate drama, the illegitimate farce, the slaughter-house tragedy, the scientific play, the drama all scenery and no brains, the drama all actor and no author; but we have not yet had the physical play. So then I intend writing on the physical imperfections of humanity—what we may term the hospital drama. Yes, Mark, I will write a play for you, called ‘Burrs.’”

“Called what?”

“‘Burrs’—things that stick closer than a brother, or a woman you want to get rid of. The name has nothing to do with the play; but that, of course, is strictly in accordance with the most advanced notions of play-writing. As to the characters, I will have a blind duke and a deaf marchioness, who dare not marry lest they should have dumb children; so, not wishing to make their physical defects hereditary, they remain single and try to raise the submerged tenth, which consists of Tom, Dick, and Harry, all more or less maimed. To the dismay of the dumb duke——”

“You said the blind duke.”

“Oh, did I? Well, to the dismay of the blind duke and the dumb marchioness——”

“The deaf marchioness.”

“Look here,” cried Julius wrathfully, “are you composing this drama or am I? Deaf or dumb—what does it matter so long as she’s wanting in some organ? I say to the dismay of the blind duke and the deaf marchioness, the damaged submerged tenth *will* marry, and thus their imperfections stick to

their offspring—which *will* come—like burrs. In despair, the duke's mother——”

“Who's she? You never mentioned her before.”

“No! she comes on without being mentioned, like a surprise packet. Well, in despair the duke's mother, finding she is the deceased wife's sister of the marchioness' father, cannot marry——”

“Marry whom? The duke, his father, or the marchioness?”

“Any one of them, particularly the last. Finding she can't marry owing to a squint in the blind duke's left eye——”

“How can he squint if he's blind?”

“I don't know; it's hereditary with the family. Well, she tries to shoot him with a pistol——”

“Shoot whom?”

“The blind duke. The shot clears the cataract off his eye, and he sees the marchioness, who hears him shriek because the explosion of the pistol cures her deafness. The parents, seeing the physical defects have not stuck like ‘Burrs,’ die to the ‘Dead March,’ and the duke marries the marchioness to the ‘Wedding March,’ illustrating the fact that those two



A BLIND DUKE.

tunes are the stock pieces of every organist in London."

"I wouldn't call it 'Burrs' if I were you," said I, satirically; "'A Midsummer's Nightmare' would be better. But if you are serious, which I can hardly believe, you surely don't expect the public to accept such ravings as sense?"

"They can accept them as they like; but they'll come and see the play."

"Why?"

"Because it's something they can't understand. No one will dare to say he or she can't understand it, in case their neighbor writes them down an ass; so they'll all rave and gush over the play as the finest tragedy since Shakespeare."

"I hope they won't think it the finest burlesque. What do you say, Mark?"

Mark only said one word and that was a rude one:

"Bosh!"

"Bosh me no bosh, thou fool!" said Julius coolly; "if you write a play that any one can understand, all the fools, seeing it is easy of comprehension, think themselves as clever as the author; if, on the other hand, you scribble something that no one can make top nor tail of, they all rave about the hidden meaning that it contains."

"I never heard such nonsense in all my life!" cried poor Mark, completely bewildered.

"Nor I," replied Julius quietly; "but if public donkeys want thistles, thistles they must have. I'm in earnest, gentlemen, so I'll write the play and read it to you in a fortnight."

"*Après?*" queried Mark, who sometimes remembers Ollendorf.

"Oh, you'll find out some one with money. We'll produce the play, and every one will say it's a sublime work."

"One Shakespeare couldn't have written," said I derisively.

"Quite right! Shakespeare wasn't an idiot—I am! But don't you like the idea, Peter? You see, if the mad duke's mother was the deceased wife's sister of——"

I could stand it no longer, so I threw a cushion at the head of the maniac; whereupon he retired in dudgeon, with the avowed intention of writing out these extraordinary ideas. While Mark, after moaning quietly for a time about his misfortunes, also retreated to his room, and I was left alone to think over this method-in-madness play of Julius Dansford.

"After all," said I, while engaged in the humble occupation of polishing my boots—"after all, is it more ridiculous than those gigantic farces of Aristophanes with their choruses of frogs, wasps, and clouds, in which the faults and follies of the Athenians were as mercilessly satirized as Julius proposes to satirize the gnat-straining, camel-swallowing world of to-day?"

Is it harder to write nonsense than sense? I, for one, should think not; and yet Julius told me, with tears in his eyes, that never had he set himself a harder task than the writing of this drama of midnight. Considering that he had only to go out into society in order to hear as many silly remarks as he pleased, I pointed out to him that he might have

obtained the whole of his dialogue by these simple means; but to this Julius responded that he never went into society for three reasons: He did not care for society; he knew no one in society; and he had no dress-suit fit for society. This last objection I own was a strong one, as society prefers a man with no brains to one with no clothes; and as Julius kept most of his wardrobe at the pawnshop, it was



A DEAF MARCHIONESS.

perhaps natural that he should have a difficulty about his dress-clothes, seeing he had no wherewithal to redeem the only suit he possessed. Society, therefore, being out of the question, and we Bohemians talking nothing but sense, Julius was obliged to evolve all foolishness from his brain, which, not being used to the treatment, objected strongly to such frivolity and gave forth ideas which a child

might understand. This, however, was not what Julius wanted, mystery being the aim of this play; but after a long wrestling with his obstinate knowledge-box, he succeeded in producing speeches sufficiently foolish and obscure for the carrying out of

the nightmare plot. At length, when the author's hair grew perceptibly thinner, owing to his habit of wrenching out a handful with every thought, the drama was completed, and Aaron, myself, Mark, and Eugene formed ourselves into a committee to sit in judgment on:

BURRS:

An entirely new and original
Physical Fancy,
Translated and freely adapted from
The modern Greek
of

Constantine Palæologus Manuel Justin Mavrocordato.

"Shade of Sophocles," sighed Eugene, on hearing this appalling name, "what a patronymic! If the play is as long as the name, I can't wait."

"'Tis in one act."

At this delightful announcement we all heaved a sigh of relief, and Aaron, who wanted to weep tears of gratitude on the breast of the author, was forcibly detained in his chair; while Julius gave us his list of *dramatis personæ*:

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| A Blind Duke. | The Mother of the Blind. |
| A Deaf Marchioness. | The Father of the Deaf. |
| An Idiot. | An Angora Cat. |
| Five Wooden-legged Men. | Five Armless Women. |

SCENE.—A Dustbin.

"A dustbin!" we all cried in astonishment.

"Yes, a dustbin!" repeated Julius firmly. "The stage is bricked up half-way all three sides; and the characters sit about the stage on bags of rubbish."

"Rubbish on rubbish," said Aaron, rudely. "Ossa on Pelion. But what about entrances and exits?"

"There are none. The whole cast is on the stage at the same time."

"Haven't your characters got any names?"

"No! that's the leading feature of *The Drama of the Future*. They address each other as 'O thou!'"

"Well, I must say, you're giving the public a pretty strong dose," said Eugene grimly. "Go on! let us hear the dialogue."

Upon this hint Julius read the immortal work, which consisted of five scenes in one act. At the first scene we sighed, at the second groaned audibly, at the third fidgeted in our chairs, at the fourth arose to our feet, and the fifth was hardly concluded when we were all four trying to get out of the door at the same time. Julius was not angry; on the contrary, he roared with laughter, whereupon we all came back and sat down again.

"It's too bad of you, Julius," said Mark reproachfully; "gull the public if you like, but don't try such rubbish on your friends."

"Well, do you think it will go?"

"I don't know about the piece," said Eugene emphatically; "but I am quite sure the public will. Don't be an idiot, Julius; the public will stand a lot, but not 'Burrs.'"

"Oh yes, they will, and for several reasons."

"Number one?"

"They won't understand it."

"Quite right! No one out of a lunatic asylum could. Number two?"

"It's by a foreign author; whom I intend to call the Greek Gilbert, because he—in my person—writes topsy-turvy."

"That certainly is a point in its favor, particularly the author being a Greek—we've not had a modern Greek play yet."

"No! nor will again, after this rubbish is put on the stage."

"It's a very large practical joke," said I reflectively.

"And one that won't take," responded Eugene, taking up the MS. daintily, as if he feared 'twas a viper which would bite him. "Who would stand dialogue like this?"

"*Marchioness*—I can hear—can hear—can hear nothing.

"*Duke*—That is because you are deaf; but I cannot see—cannot see your deafness. What slow blue linen stars.

"*Marchioness*—No! no! You cannot—you cannot, you are blind. You see not my purple agonies.

"*Five Wooden-legged Men*—She is deaf—he is blind—we are all without legs—all! all! all! all! all! all! all!

"*Five Armless Women*—And our arms! Ah! we have no arms—we are physically incomplete. Ah! piercing gamboge shrieks.

"*All (in unison)*—Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"'Heuh! heuh! said the baker's wife,'" cried Julius, when Eugene threw the MS. from him in disgust. "It is awful, I admit—I never said it was not; but it is carefully modelled on the dialogue of the Russian Ben Jonson. A drama of fragrance and color."

"O rare Ben!" I said, letting fall a tear, "how thou art maligned!"

"Well, here is the play," remarked Julius, putting the MS. in his pocket; "but what about a theatre?"

"No theatre will put it on."

"Except one of which Mark is the manager."

"I!" roared Mark indignantly. "Do you think I'm going to put on such maniac rubbish as that."

"Oh! oh! So you've got a theatre?"

"Well, I've got a friend who has promised to back me for a good amount, and I'm going to take the Musidora; but we play burlesque."

"Burlesque!" cried Julius, rising in fine wrath. "Is this the end of all your aspirations for elevating the drama?"

"You can't elevate the drama out of a dustbin."

"Well, who wants to?" said Julius with a sudden change from tragedy to farce. "All I want is to make a sensation. This thing will draw from its very idiocy."

"I believe that," retorted Mark ironically; "but Laura says——"

"Laura?"

We all uttered the name and then smiled. Mark, being yet young and timid, blushed and looked cross; then, unable to stand the fire of satirical glances, fled in dismay. So nothing was settled about *The Drama of the Future* at that symposium.

"And to think," said Julius as he took his leave; "that a woman and a burlesque should spoil the future of the English drama!"

As far as that went, the burlesque was not needed, for the woman did all the spoiling on her own account. For a woman did spoil all chances the idiot drama might have had; and how she did it I propose to narrate in the next chapter, entitled "*The Songs of the Sirens.*"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SONGS OF THE SIRENS.

'TWAS a woman, of course. Madam, you can see by this observation that I purpose speaking ill of your charming sex; therefore I would advise you, in a friendly spirit, not to read such tiresome scribblings. Later on I promise you Shakespearian eulogies on the perfections of feminality; but this chapter— No! madam, if you are wise—as I doubt not you are—you will skip it in scornful silence. And yet having read it—as you assuredly will do, the more so for such prohibition—you may perhaps agree with me in my estimate of Laura. One woman rarely spares another woman; and Laura had, I fear, too many charms to admit of your unqualified approval. Yet, on the whole, I think 'tis better you should peruse these heresies; for you can agree or disagree with the remarks as you please, especially as this well-bred book will not contradict you; therefore, madam, with your gracious permission I will relate the story of Laura and her lovers, whose number, like the number of the Beast in Revelation, is a point which will bear much arguing.

Do you know Greek, madam? No! Great heavens! and this is the age of Girton blue-stockings. Nay, I blame you not—in fact, I rather give praise for such ignorance, and, for my part, prefer a rosy scholar in Cupid's school—with myself as her teacher

—to all such spectacted feminine pedantry. Yet 'tis a wonderful language, but confoundedly hard to learn, almost as hard as Chinese, but not so chromatic in its vocal sounds. Why I mention Greek is that one Simonides, a poet of Amorgos, wrote his verses therein, which rhymings assert—and with some show of reason—that every woman resembles a certain animal more or less. Thus we have the thrifty woman, who is like a bee; the vain woman, similar to a peacock; the untidy woman, akin to a pig; and so on through the whole animal creation—all of which comparisons will, I am sure, madam, offend you mightily, though none of my invention. Yet, going on the same system, Laura was a sparrow, for pertness; a fox, for cunning; and an eagle, for ambition; not excepting the mule, which was scarce her equal for obstinacy; so, were I to draw a picture of the beasts she resembled *totus in unum*, 'twould be like nothing in Nature, but some heterogeneous compound after the fashion of Ariosto's hippograff or the Revelation animal I mentioned some time since.

Yes! certainly Laura was impudent, cunning, and ambitious, greedy of admiration and fickle as a weathercock; yet, to balance these undesirable qualities I must own she had some good points, such as thrift, generosity, perseverance, and a great sense of appreciation, which latter endowment I would all my readers possessed in full measure. A curious mixture of good and evil was Laura, and often have I wondered at the dual natures which fought for mastery in her soul, each showing itself alternately like the red and white tints of a revolving light.

Bright and dull, good and wicked, kindly, cruel, fickle, stanch—oh! she had as many sides to her character as Dryden's Buckingham, and, being a woman, was infinitely more charming.

I thank the gods that I fell not into her snares,



"YES! CERTAINLY LAURA WAS IMPUDENT."

being saved from such a bitter-sweet fate by the unhandsomeness of my appearance, which had no attraction for her; though truth to tell, she hunted all manner of scalps for her wigwam, and in default of Hyperions would hunt Satyrs—caring in some

cases but little for outward show provided her quarry was masculine and capable of ministering to her vanity. Certainly she had a pretty talent for twisting the masculine sex round her fingers, and, unaided by any philtre, made her victims so mad with love that they would have lied—and did lie, like Katherine the Shrew after taming, at the bidding of this female Petruchio. Perhaps, madam, you think she flouted me, that I speak so sourly—that she did not, I swear, but she flouted Lionel Amberton for Mark Trevanna; him, for Lord knows who, which piece of female caprice lost the world that aforementioned “Drama of the Future” as exemplified by “Burrs;” and this brings the wheel of my discourse full circle to my opening remark—“’Twas a woman, of course.”

Why she should have taken up with Mark, or with Lionel either, I could never quite make out; but take up with them she did, and a terrible havoc she made of their belief in womankind. Perchance she was weary of money *sans* brains, so thought she would like to try the reverse by way of a change. Oh! no woman is satisfied with one apple off the Tree of Knowledge. Let her once nibble at the fruit, and she goes on plucking and eating until she dies. Laura had devoured a good peck of apples in her time, mostly golden ones, I fancy; but now she was minded for that pale fruit, warmed by no sun of prosperity, which withers in the shade of cheerless garrets, and therefore made eyes at Lionel, who, nothing loath, made eyes in his turn. The result of such telegraphy was obvious. She came, he saw, Love conquered; and poor Lionel, guileless in all

erotic matters, lived in the seventh heaven of a fool's paradise until Laura espied Mark. Our Garrick was better-looking than Lionel; he was more wrapped



“AND THEREFORE MADE EYES AT LIONEL.”

up in his work, and was therefore somewhat indifferent to this changeable Eve, which two reasons were quite enough to induce Laura to besiege this man-

soul, or rather man's-heart, with all the artillery of her charms. Alas! my poor Roscius, thou wert no Joseph as regards a pretty woman; therefore the weak bulwarks of thy heart yielded but too easily to the battery of those bright eyes, and woman the conqueror entered in triumph into the citadel of thy being. *Væ victis* indeed thou mayest cry, blind fool of Cupid, not only for the jilted Lionel, but also for thyself, whose turn of disaster is yet to come; for Laura, thou knowest, being a methodical young person, began, carried on, and terminated her conquests always in the same way.

Not that it was love alone that made her set her cap at Mark; for her theatre, *The Frivolity*, being closed for a space, she was at present out of an engagement; and hearing by side-winds that Mark had secured a wealthy man to aid him to open a booth in the interests of the *Drama of the Future*, she made up her mind to obtain an engagement therein. Mark was to be the Providence of this special theatre, so him she cajoled, and with such success that she was engaged as a prominent member of the company at an excellent salary. As to Lionel, jilted, soured, and wrathful, he returned to his novel-writing and wrote abusive stories for a society journal, which railed at what we ironically call the weaker sex in good set terms. Mark, therefore, was promoted to the command of this fickle heart, vice Lionel resigned, and life for him during those days was made up of "Burrs," *Laura*, *Julius*, *The Omnibus Playhouse*, and *Lord Framley*.

This latter person was a living proof of the wisdom of hereditary legislature. He could not govern him-

self; therefore, according to the constitution, he was fit to govern the nation; he had no self-respect, but was entitled to hat-bowings and knee-grovellings on account of his title; he wasted his life in frivolity and small beer, which seemed a sufficient reason that his comings and goings should be catalogued in newspapers for the information of his fellow-men. Not but what he knew a great deal about clothes, cigarettes, horses, and pretty women. Still, knowledge of such abstruse socialisms do not make a great man. If they did we should be a nation of geniuses, and Piccadilly a new Parnassus. Lord Framley was nothing more than Lord Framley; yet his title covered all his sins, which, to do him justice, were very harmless, as he had not enough brains to sin in any very marked or original manner.

Mark, then, in his salad days had been very intimate with him at Oxford, but had lost sight of him since they both left the tender embraces of Alma Mater. One day, however, after Julius had completed his physical drama, its would-be producer while walking in the Strand, that highway of mummers, stumbled against this scion of the aristocracy and found him hard-up for a new sensation; so, over a friendly drink at the Gaiety bar, to which Framley had taken him, Mark proposed his theatrical scheme, which, strange to say, met with my lord's unqualified approval. Other pleasures and means of getting rid of money he had exhausted, but the idea of being the lessee of the theatre was new and enticing; so he on the spot constituted Mark his manager, and bade him search out a Thespian temple. The result was The Omnibus Theatre, whose name was symbolical

of producing all things for all people; and on the first of April—All Fool's Day, which was certainly in keeping with the mad idea of the physical drama—it was notified to the public that there would be



“OVER A FRIENDLY DRINK.”

performed “‘Alcibiades,’ a classical play in one act; ‘Burrs,’ a physical drama in one act; and ‘Much Ado about Something,’ a burlesque on Shakespeare’s comedy.”

“If that doesn’t draw the town,” said Mark, complacently looking at the rainbow-tinted posters, “I’m a Dutchman!”

“You soon will be,” I remarked ironically; “after

'Burrs' is produced you will be a 'Flying Dutchman.'"

"Oh, they can hunt Julius, not me! But if they don't like 'Burrs,' they may take to 'Alcibiades;' and if that doesn't suit them, Laura's burlesque will make them laugh."

"So will 'Burrs.' By the way, what does Laura think of her part?"

"She's delighted. Lots of fun in Benedict, the married man. She's a dear little woman."

"Yes, you'll find that out before you've done with her."

Mark shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm only manager, not the banker. It will be Framley's loss."

"Humph! perhaps his gain."

"What do you mean, Peter?"

"*Femme souvent varie.*"

Mark said nothing, but walked off in a huff, which was very ungrateful on his part, seeing how anxious I was to open his eyes to the way in which Laura was carrying on with the member of the Upper House. I saw plainly through her little game, for having secured her engagement she had no further need of Mark; while, Lord Framley being an idiot, she began to dream of coronets, titles, runaway marriages, and Heaven only knows what else.

Of course we all went to work with ardor to make "Burrs" a success. Julius drilled the company who were to render this nightmare, Mark treated several influential critics to free drinks, and I, having the ear of a few penny-a-liners, got paragraphs inserted in the papers regarding the absolute novelty of the

play. It was hinted that so mystic was the meaning of the piece that no one could understand it, while the startling novelty of the scene and dialogue would probably puzzle the audience. In fact the playgoers of London were given plainly to understand that those with brains would pronounce it a great drama, and those without brains would scorn it for a silly farce; so, as no one placed himself in the latter category, it will be easily seen that every one was determined to praise "Burrs" as an intellectual riddle, lest by giving forth the opposite opinion he should write himself down an ass.

Well, All Fools' Day came, and with it all fools who were simple enough to believe that a drama called "Burrs" could be an intellectual treat. Framley had been carefully kept out of the theatre during its rehearsal, else even his brains must have grasped the fact that such a piece was but a mad freak at the best; but all he knew was that there was a burlesque to follow, and that Laura was going to appear therein, which was to his mind a sufficiently good return for his money laid out in the rent and salaries.

"Alcibiades" was a Greek piece—with nothing Athenian in it save the names—made up of very blank verse in the ten-finger measure, containing modern thought badly expressed; but the scene of the Acropolis of Athens was capital, and as there was plenty of clowning on the part of Socrates and Xantippe, the audience, on the whole, were so good as to express their approval. Then the orchestra having played the audience sufficiently into the dolefuls by performing a selection from the last new comic opera, the curtain rose on "Burrs." The dust-

bin scene certainly took the audience somewhat aback; nor were their spirits raised by the spectacle of the deaf, dumb, and blind all camping on the stage, like a rag-shop. Mark played the Duke, and soliloquized, in speeches forty lines long, on life and its ills; whereupon the audience, hearing a lot of platitudes wrapped up in fine-sounding words, began to think there was a great moral lesson to be learned from this strange play. The Marchioness said to the Duke, "Life is no joke;" then the Duke, after a long, long pause, came front gnawing his nails, and repeated slowly, "Life is no joke;" whereupon the audience, with a gasp, remembered their unpaid bills and said to one another in low whispers, "How true! how wonderful! What profundity of thought!" The play went on amid a dead silence, with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth from the various humanities on the stage, and when the curtain fell on the embrace of the cured aristocrats over the bodies of their parents, the audience were too moved to applaud—at least that is what Julius said; but, for my part, I believed them too thunderstruck. Then the critics went out to sample the whiskey and hear each other's opinions, of which there were so many different ones that there seemed to be considerable danger of a row. Some critics said "Burrs" was rubbish; others replied that it was profound philosophy; while a few thought that it was the worthy revival of the old Greek intellect.

"Only a Greek could have written it," said Penderby of *The Town Crier*, who talked more classicism and knew less about it than any man in London.

"And only an English audience could have sat

through it," retorted Dempson, who was on a rival newspaper and hated Penderby worse than the devil—the latter personage being rather a friend of his than otherwise. Then ensued a babel of talk—of assent, dissent, praise, and blame.

"It is certainly not a brilliant play."

"No, but it is profound—deep as 'a Highland tarn!'"

"Humph! and about as inviting."

"Such a disregard for conventionalities!"

"True! humanity doesn't live in a dustbin."

"Ah! that is symbolical of the old dead faiths and ideas—mental dust and rubbish which we are trying to get rid of. But the piece is learned. Science has conquered the playwrights."

"But not the playgoers."

"'Tis a drama of atmosphere."

"Not at all!—a farce of fragrance!"

"A worthy pendant to the gloom of Dante's 'Inferno.'"

"Oh yes! that dustbin is the seventh circle of hell."

"You have done a great work, sir!" cried Penderby, seizing Julius by the hand. "The translation is worthy of the play. Has the author written any more?"

"Oh yes! plenty of plays," said Julius, a lie on his lips at once; "only it is no use translating any more of them until we see how this play takes."

"It will take. Yes! it goes home to the hearts of all. Every one has a dustbin into which they cast all their foolish ideas, their failures, their prejudices."

"Humph! I thought all those sorts of things went into the waste-paper basket."

Julius was considerably bewildered over the success of his play. It seemed absurd that men supposed to have brains should accept such trifling seriously, and yet they did; for, in spite of the jeers of a few, "Burrs" was admired by the many as a piece containing the germs of all human thought.

"You are right, Peter," said Julius to me afterward. "Start anything, however silly, and you will find followers."

"Nothing so ridiculous as the Mormon Bible was ever written," I replied sententiously, "and yet thousands take it as their creed. "Burrs" is even worse; still, it will find admirers, and your physical drama will become the nucleus of a cult."

There is nothing like argument for keeping a thing before the public, and as half the newspapers praised it up and the other half ran it down, all London thronged to *The Omnibus* to see this great novelty. Very soon lank and haggard young men in strange garb began to haunt the theatre and talk enthusiastically of Julius as "The Master." They started a society with the motto, "Nothing is perfect;" and many, in imitation of "Burrs," wrote similar dramas, which were produced with more or less success. I need only mention "The Wooden Leg," "The Toothless Traitor," "The Shattered Spine," and "Club-foot," to bring to the minds of my readers the success of the new school, which, however much it failed to take hold of the public at large, yet endured for a time among a select set who raved over physical imperfections, and said plainly that the drama began in England with the production of "Burrs." Julius, however, I am sorry to say, who founded this new

school, was unable to bear the monster he had created, à la Frankenstein, so left his ideal of the physical drama and took to writing melodrama for the Adelphi.

As to Laura's burlesque, it went capitally, and she soon danced herself into the affections of the noble lessee. He took to calling on her at Mrs. Prass' lodging-house, where Laura occupied a first floor; and she entranced his ear by the brilliant way in which she sang nigger melodies to the strumming of a banjo. A very Orpheus she proved, and charmed this beast—he was a donkey coroneted to hide his ears, after the example of Midas—right well, much to the wrath of Mark, who found himself ignominiously put on one side.

"The Songs of the Sirens," said I to the gloomy youth, as we heard Laura singing to Framley one afternoon. "She'll ensnare him and pick his bones."

"Oh no, she won't," observed Eugene, who lounged near; "it is not plunder our harpy wants, but marriage."

"Framley's an ass," retorted Mark, with a sneer; "but he's not ass enough to make her his wife."

"Why not? It is the fashion to take peeresses from music halls. 'Tis a new order we call the Periage."

"I see! on the presumption that these peris gain a social paradise?"

"Exactly! every peri accompanied by a titled ass is admitted. No ass, no entry."

"And you think that Laura——?"

"I, dear Mark, I don't think. I'm certain that Laura has made up her mind to be Lady Framley."



"THE SONGS OF THE SIREN."

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"Disgraceful!"

"Not at all! 'Tis simply a return to the old order of things. Nell Gwynne, Barbara Palmer, Louise de Querouailles are responsible for a goodly number of our aristocrats. History repeats itself. Laura will be Lady Framley, and dine with a bishop e'er she dies."

"But she loves me!"

Eugene smiled and raised his eyebrows, a nasty trick of disbelief which has its effect on the best tempers. Mark had not the best of tempers, and so:

"I will go and see Laura," he cried, and plunged out of the room; while the strumming of the banjo sounded clearly through the open door, with Laura's voice accompanying it like a mocking-bird.

"Oh, the songs of the sirens—the songs of the sirens!" sighed Eugene, and lighted a fresh pipe.

What transpired at that interview between the lover and the beloved we never knew, but guessed the result from Mark's subsequent demeanor. He went down to The Omnibus Theatre, settled his accounts, and took all his things away; whereupon the daily papers appeared next morning with a new name as manager, and Mark—alas! poor Mark disappeared. We never saw him again, for he was not the man to parade his griefs before the world; and leaving Laura in full possession of the field, he vanished from Bohemia forever. Where he went, what he did, I do not know; but the songs of the sirens had wrecked his life like that of many and goodly men, and the siren herself, having a fresh victim to pipe ditties to, never troubled her shallow soul about the man who had gone under. Perchance our Garrick returned

home, like the prodigal son, and devoured the domestic veal; perhaps he went abroad and tended flocks, patriarch fashion, 'neath the Southern Cross; but at all events he departed and was swallowed up by the great ocean of life.

"And Laura?"

Oh, Laura netted her victim, and she also disappeared from Bohemia; but in the land Philistia



"ARISTOCRATIC TO
HER FINGER-TIPS."

dwelleteth a very grand lady, who is aristocratic to her finger-tips. She never touches a banjo nor sings nigger melodies, so the songs of that special siren are mute forevermore. Lady Framley makes her husband a good wife and forgets all about that little episode of the Drama of the Future and Mark Trevanna; or if she does think of it and him, 'tis only to congratulate herself that the play and the man made such excellent stepping-stones to the Periage of which she is a brilliant member.

As to the Drama of the Future, that also is dead and done with; for such an exotic could not flourish in our cold climate, where the struggle for existence has beaten sense into most brains; but on turning over some old papers the other day I found the manuscript of "Burrs," and on reading it marvelled that such foolery could have passed muster as intellect. However, it served its turn; for if Laura used

it as a stepping-stone to the Periage, Julius also found it a lift to higher regions than Bohemia, and his successful melodramas, if not original, at least bring him in plenty of money through their fitness for the tastes of an Adelphi audience.

With "Burrs" I also found another manuscript. None other than a song which I wrote on the pipings of Laura—those pipings which gained her a coronet at the expense of that trifle, a man's broken heart.

THE SONGS OF THE SIRENS.

I.

Strange singing sounds from over sea,
Clear crystal cryings in the night,
Caressing voices call to me
Adrift upon the waters white:
"To our soft arms we thee invite,
And o'er thy slumber watch will keep;
For we can give thee calm and deep
The best of boons—eternal sleep."

II.

The Sirens sing, the shallop floats
To where those sounds pipe voice and lyre;
My heart is drawn by magic notes,
Which thrill it with a wild desire.
Of world, of work, of woe, I tire,
And now would leave this life's alarms
For that sweet Siren voice which charms
My soul to sleep in Siren arms.

III.

The shallop floats, the Sirens sing,
And o'er the moonlit sea I glide;
When lo! I see lie ring in ring
White bones that glisten 'neath the tide.
A Siren clasps me to her side,
And fatal words of dole she saith:
"Come, yield to us thy latest breath;
We give thee sleep—the sleep of death!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HUNTING OF THE MUSE.

"I HAVE lost the Muse," said Aaron, coming into my room one June evening at sunset hour, when there was more gold in the western skies than in my pockets.

"Alas! my friend, I also have invoked her with but ill success. She has gone a-gipsying, this frolic Erato—doubtless being weary of our humble fare, for which I can scarcely blame her."

"The Muse! the Muse! the frolic Muse!
Why doth she now her aid refuse?"

"Dost think, Aaron, such gruesome singing will bring her back?"

"Some truer goddess I must choose
Than this same errant idle Muse."

"Borrow Melpomene from Julius Dansford. She is no vagrant, but loves four bare walls—as thus,—two actors—as now,—and a passion, which I will be in presently, an' you go on with that unmannerly jingle of Muse, refuse, and choose."

"Dear Peter, my mistakes excuse,
And aid me now to find the Muse."

"Pah! doggerel!"

"'Tis all I can evolve in the way of rhyme," said

Aaron, dejectedly. "Ah me, unhappy! the sacred fire will not burn!"

"'Tis June, and warm," I replied thankfully; "therefore fire is not needed, for which I am profoundly grateful, as I have no coals and not the wherewithal to buy a scuttle."

"I am afraid Mademoiselle Erato is disgusted, Peter. She caught me rhyming an advertisement for somebody's soap, and has doubtless fled from a bard given to such mercantile scribblings. Still, such debasement of our art brought me a guinea. I shall sup to-night. But you, Peter?"

"Dry bread for breakfast; cold water and apples for dinner. To-night I sup with Duke Humphry—or with you?"

"By all means. Come out with me in search of my lost goddess, and on our journey we will buy something for a royal banquet. Will you so?"

Lord! wouldn't I so? seeing I was as ill-filled as the boxes of a provincial theatre. My seventeen pounds had long since gone to benefit mankind at large, and now I was on the same footing as my fellow-Bohemians, asking daily for bread, but too often receiving a stone. 'Twas ever extremes with us in those lean days—either the feast of Dives or the crust of Lazarus. Of late Lazarus had been with us, but now Aaron and his unexpected guinea inspired me with gluttonous desires, and my stomach cried "Cupboard! cupboard!" most heartily.

"The walk," observed Aaron cruelly, "will give us an appetite."

"Dost wish to see me roll a corpse on this humble floor, thou Hebrew melodist? An appetite, forsooth!

and I as hungry as Elijah in the desert, with less prospect of being fed!"

"I will be your raven, Peter; but first we must seek the Muse."

"Such unprofitable ghost-hunting!"

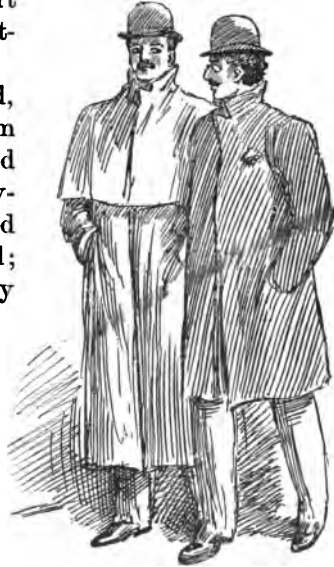
"No Muse, no supper! Peter, I must find her. She is lost, and I am in despair. These last four hours have I worshipped with pen, ink, and fair white paper, but the jade hears me not, so I must go forth into the highways and byways to hunt for her."

'Twas no use fighting against Fate or Aaron; so forth I went with him to hunt for a Muse, an appetite, and a supper.

The deuce! Why was I created sympathetic, thus becoming a moral waste-paper basket, into which my friends throw all the unconsidered trifles of their minds? In truth, I am one of those people on the stage of the world who, like their prototypes on the stage of the theatre, stand as receptacles for the long-winded histories of the more heroic characters, and jog their memories when failing with pointed questions of this, that, and the other thing. Alack! the amorous confidences that I have received. Were I a traitor to such oath-sealed love tales, I could write you a hundred stories of billings and cooings, after the style of the Veronese lovers; and as for narratives of misery, with many sorrows could I wring your hearts. For hours have I sat with — and — (I betray not my friends), and heard their ten-volume experiences of the perfidy of woman or the treachery of man, receiving but in recompense for such wearisome outpourings the disarming apology, "You are so sympathetic!" *Au diable* with

such compliments! Why am I not selfish, so as to escape these afflictions? But then I am long-suffering, as Aaron knows truly, else might I have cut short his biography at the outset.

"I was born," he said, as we walked arm-in-arm through the crowded streets, "of poor but Jewish parents. They vended old clothes for a livelihood; but I, having no hereditary instinct for such traffic, refused to perpetuate the glories of the house by spoiling the Gentiles; wherefore was I held lacking in the useful Hebrew habit of laying hands on all that belonged to other people, which did them such



"AS WE WALKED ARM-IN-ARM."

service when they took the Promised Land from its rightful owners. Nature truly played me a sad trick when she slipped a Christian soul into a Jewish body, and turned it adrift among Hebraic synagogues as Aaron. A Jewish soul in a Christian trunk would be better, for it could conform to the outward observances of the Chosen People: whereas my body, inclining to the feast of Purim and the celebrating of the Passover, is constantly drawn away by an alien soul which desires the plum-pudding and Christmas

rejoicings of the Gentiles. Not only for this do I blame Nature, but also for gifting me with useless baggage of a poet's brain, for which—to adjust the balance—she had to rob me of all capacity for swindling, peculating, cheating, lying—in fact, of all those qualities for getting the better of our fellow-men which are combined in the generic term of business. No! I could never learn the old-clothes profession. I could write poetry, but clinch no bargains; I could make verses, but not money. So my parents were in despair at thus having a duck in their hen's nest. They are dead now, my parents, and rest in the Jewish cemetery and in the bosom of Abraham—thus being in two places at once, a miracle they could never achieve in their lifetimes. Such decease cut the moorings which anchored me among Yiddish crafts, and thus I drifted into Bohemia, where, as you see, I am still, and where I am likely to be until Death rights the mistake of Nature and releases my round soul-peg from this square hole of a body. My education! true, I have had but little instruction, save in the three 'R's'; still, poetry is not so much an art as an inspiration. God, pitying the ill-advised mixture of soul and body which now walks beside you, has given me beautiful dreams, which I put into gyves of metre and call poetry. What the world calls it I know not, seeing no publisher will clothe my naked manuscript in the decent dress of print."

"It is strange," said I, reflectively, "that one so uneducated as you proclaim yourself to be should write smooth verse of such delicacy."

"Poetry is not so much an art as an inspiration," replied Aaron again, much flattered at my apprecia-

tion. "Keats, you know, was ignorant of Greek, yet wrote as might have a dweller in Periclean Athens—or one in Sicily, if you class him with Theocritus. Burns was no scholar, yet his poems, composed at the plough, are gems of lyrical writing. Chatterton, in his teens, imposed his antique verse even on Horace Walpole, yet had not a university career. And I could quote you one Shakespeare, whose education was so poor, and his plays so rich in philosophy, art, music, botany, and all such marvels of human intellect, that to solve the riddle his miracles of learning are fathered on Bacon. That education improves a poet, I doubt not; but, for my part, I would rather have written 'Endymion,' with all its mistakes and childishness, than the flowing numbers of Pope, so perfectly smoothed by the pumice-stone of education. Nay, 'tis best to let certain poets sing as they will, seeing they have the bird's gift of song. God has taught me more than the schools; so I pipe my tunes as He bids me, and doubtless they ring as true as those who sing with more cultured voices."

"Methinks your education, enough though you deem it, is yet incomplete."

"Aye! and how so?"

"You have never been in love."

"True, Peter! I have dreamed of Eros and hymned to him, but never have I beheld him."

"Some day he will come to you," I replied, prophetically, "and then you will write something great——"

"With my heart's blood," rejoined Aaron, bitterly.

"I may love, but what woman will listen to that love? My brain is my fortune, not my face; though

doubtless the one will bring me as small an income as the other. Love! love! Alas, Cupid, I doubt not you will some day wound me with thine arrow, and turn me into a laughing-stock for the floutings of womankind!

“Go hence, thou ugly face!
No charm of manly grace
Thy crooked frame possesses.
Since thou art born so plain,
Thy loving is in vain;
So pay not thine addresses.

By Apollo! friend Peter, my Muse is near. I heard the rustle of her robe as she breathed those rhymes in my ear.”

“And such bad rhymes!”

“No man, however ungainly, but recoils from jesting on his imperfections. A fair soul in an ugly body is but a pearl in a rough oyster, and but few espy its hidden beauties. Nay, Peter, were I to woo a damsel she would lock this ill-favored skeleton in a cupboard for very shame; therefore will I remain a bachelor till God sends me a mate who can discover Apollo in the form of Pan.”

Thus he ran on carelessly in this cynical vein; but I, after a time, paid no attention to his Timonisms, being taken up with the spectacle of a crowd in the street surrounding a carriage.

“Leave your bewailings of Fate,” I said, dragging him toward the crowd, “and let us see what is the matter.”

“O frivolous mind of man!” said Aaron; but nevertheless yielded to curiosity.



"BATHED IN THE WHITE GLARE OF THE ELECTRIC LIGHT."

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'Twas the matter of an ill-fastened wheel which had come off the carriage, thereby rendering the horses restive and endangering the lives of the occupants. These latter, man and woman—or rather, I should say, seeing they were well-clad, lady and gentleman—were now standing by the wreck of their vehicle, the masculine being talking excitedly to a policeman who had suddenly appeared on the scene, while the feminine was looking supremely indifferent to the whole affair.

Bright shone the glare of the electric light above her head; and standing there in a long white opera-cloak, draping her limbs like some graceful robe of ancient Greece, she looked like a beautiful statue. Lovely was her face, yet with the chill loveliness of an ice-maiden; and the diamonds which sparkled in her brown hair were as hard in their gleam as her splendid eyes. I turned to call Aaron's attention to this frigid beauty, and found him with his whole face wrapt in contemplation of the goddess. As he felt rather than saw I was trying to attract his attention, his lips moved, and he whispered in a deep voice:

"The Muse! the Muse! She that was lost is found!"

Ridiculous to thus materialize the deities of Parnassus! yet on a second glance at that white form, bathed in the white glare of the electric light, I could not deny that she was wonderfully beautiful, yet, curiously enough, with the soulless beauty of a marble statue. White cloak, white face, white gems—all perfectly colorless; and yet some intuition told me that this pallid-looking woman was cruel in her

instincts, and that the impassive exterior was but a mask to hide a fierce, treacherous nature. Perchance the implacable Diana of the Taurians, worshipped with human sacrifices; for cold and cruel she seemed, standing under the stars—less bright, less soulless than her own splendid eyes.

Suddenly she saw Aaron's rapt gaze, and a look of impatience passed across her face as she touched her companion on the arm.

"Call a hansom," she said, in a deep contralto voice. "I cannot wait any longer."

The gentleman, who seemed very much afraid of her, did so—atom of humanity as he was—and slipping into the cab without waiting for him to follow, she drove off, leaving her wretched escort to finish his battle over the disabled brougham. With the exit of the divinity went all further interest in the scene, and I turned round to seek for Aaron. Alas! Aaron had vanished, and with him my supper. So homeward I wended my way in a very bad temper, for I by no means relished the idea of supping with Duke Humphry, intimate friend though he was. Whither Aaron had gone I knew not—very probably he was still chasing the Muse, who had fled from him in the hansom cab—but I regretted very much that I had not taken charge of that guinea, with which I would have been able to buy myself a meal. Turning into our street, however, I met Eugene on his way home to his garret, and at once unfolded myself. Fortunately, Eugene, having sold a small picture that day, was well-off, and being well-off was generous; so we purchased the following articles for supper:

Half-pound streaky bacon.

One lobster.

Two bottles of beer.

A loaf.

Small portion of cheese.

Also half-a-pound of candles to illuminate the banquet.

My abode was the scene of the festivity, and both Eugene and myself made a clean sweep of all our purchases. Then we lighted our pipes and talked—talked over a bottle of Scotch, which the artist, with sinful extravagance, insisted upon uncorking. Then we argued, according to custom, about many things, and the nearest church-clock warned us of the swiftly flying hours. At length midnight sounded in twelve heavy strokes, and scarcely had the last died away when the door of my garret opened, and Aaron—like the ghost of Scrooge—presented himself before us. Nor did he look unlike a ghost, for he was pale and worn-out—so much, indeed, that he could only relapse into a tired heap of humanity on the bed, and move his hand suggestively toward the whiskey-bottle.

“I have found out all about her,” said Aaron, when he felt somewhat better.

“The Muse?”

“Yes. She is not Erato, but Terpsichore.”

“Why, what problem is this, son of Jacob?” demanded Eugene, scenting a history. “Peter told me of your adventure. But Erato! Terpsichore! Explain.”

“I followed the cab,” explained Aaron, lighting his pipe, “and it stopped at the stage-door of the Alhambra, into which she entered.”

"Oh, I see! In the first row of the ballet?"

"The very first. She is Cartoni."

"Ho! ho! The modern Taglioni! Is your divinity, then, so high, my Aaron? Worship not at such shrines, O poet! else she will dance your heart under her feet."

"I went into the theatre, when I heard this."

"Spending your guinea in pleasure, instead of in supper!" I groaned, reproachfully. "You quite forgot about me. How selfish lovers are! Had it not been for Eugene—but no matter. Continue your story of the dancer."

"'Tis an Indian ballet," said Aaron, staring gravely into the darkness, as if he saw the scene still before him. "She dances in a jungle, 'The Tiger Dance.' No, I was not in the theatre to-night. I was in Hindostan, nigh the Temple of Siva, the Destroyer; and over me burned the deeply-blue sky, while in the distance sounded the muffled roar of the serpent-skin drums. The palms waved their feathery branches in the hot air, and the sacred pool lay like a mirror within its carved-stone margin. I sat in the shadow of the temple and watched the whirling Nautch girls, but none were so fair as she. They swayed and gyrated to the thin music of the pipes, but none could dance as well as she. The Nautch girls paused in their dancing, yet still the music shrilled through the beating of the drums. There was a sound of silver bells, like a ripple of laughter, and she glided into my vision swathed in yellow and black veils, like the sleek skin of a tiger. Her bangles clashed musically as she raised her arms, and with half-closed eyes she began to dance. This way

—that way! swaying here and there as a reed blown by the wind, her long black hair unbound, braided with sequins and mohurs—O little feet—little brown



“HER BANGLES CLASHED MUSICALLY.”

feet, with golden bangles on the slender ankles—how lightly you danced to the beat and throb of the music! Then the wild boundings, the mystic leaping, the rapid gyrations and sudden pauses; while the heavy

air was rich with perfume, and at times the shrill voices of the Nautch girls mingled monotonously with the dull clapping of their hands. But she ended her dance and disappeared amid a cloud of veils, as her companions bore her away. Then I saw that I was not in India, but in Leicester Square—that I had not seen a sacred dance, but a ballet; and as the star of the evening had set forever, I came home to dream that I had been in hot countries.”

“Bah!” said Eugene rudely, when Aaron ended this rhapsody, “you are in love.”

“Ten fathoms deep!”

“With a ballet-dancer?”

“Kismet! It is Fate!”

“And what are you going to do?” I asked, curious to know if the poet had any plans.

“Go to bed,” retorted Aaron, making a dash at the door. “Good-night!”

He vanished into the darkness, and Eugene looked hard at me.

“Going to bed, the humbug? No; he is going to write poetry!”

Eugene was a true prophet, for the next day Aaron came to me with a sheet of paper, and, after the manner of the “Arabian Nights,” made and recited the following verses:

“Indeed, my dear, 'twas lack of sense
To trust my heart unto your keeping;
For such a foolish confidence,
The just reward I now am reaping.

You smiled so sweet, you looked so true,
That I, poor fool, believed you nearly;
So gave my foolish heart to you,
And dreamed that you would prize it dearly.

Alack! how soon passed all my joy,
How quick I found what grief and woe meant!
My heart you deemed an idle toy,
To play with for an idle moment.

'My love was scarcely worth your thought,
And yet from slumber deep you woke it;
My heart—Love's nest—to you I brought,
And for a moment's sport you broke it!

To bitter now hath changed the sweet:
From spoiling souls no woman ceases.
You danced my heart beneath your feet,
And now you dance upon the pieces!"

"I don't know why you are so bitter," I said, reflectively, handing back this Heinesque effusion to its author. "Not a verse of that is true."

"No; but it will be."

"A pleasant time you have to look forward to! I congratulate you."

"'Tis after the mode of Looking-glass Country," said Aaron absently. "What will happen has already happened—to my mind. I will go after this phantom, and when I clutch it 'twill change into a flesh-and-blood woman. I will give her my heart, and she will break it."

"You seem to revel in the idea of such misery!"

"Pshaw! I'm a fool; so I go away to act like one."

He certainly did, for the programme of those bitter verses was carried out with the utmost fidelity. I never had the pleasure of Cartoni's personal acquaintance, therefore I cannot conceive what made her treat the mad passion of a poor Bohemian poet as serious. Perhaps it was the natural pride a woman

feels in gaining a heart, however valueless. Perhaps she used him as a means of exciting jealousy in the breasts of other men. But whatever was the reason, she certainly was very kind to our Hebrew melodist. Aaron was a very fascinating fellow, after all, and possessed in a great measure that dæmonic quality of which Goethe speaks; but then he kept no guard over himself, and suffered terribly from the faults of his own indiscretions. He made up his mind to love



"HOW LACHRYMOSE WAS THY
FACE."

Cartoni, and becoming acquainted with her in some way flung his heart and his genius at her feet. She took both, and, treating them as toys, broke one and spoiled the other. What could our fragile poet do against this brilliant, heartless tigress, who held him under her claws? Nothing! He gave her all, and she took all. Then, when she wearied of his piping of old tunes, she gave him the door, and went off to France—to Paris—wicked and charming, with a wealthy Englishman.

Alas! my poor Aaron, how I pitied thee in those days! How lachrymose was thy face! How sadly didst thou move along, and thy verse was as melancholy as thy visage! But why despair so? You

started in that love-race with no illusions; so now there proves to have been none, 'tis foolish to mourn over what never was. Time heals all wounds, my wounded poet; and if thy heart is broken, perchance some cement may be found to patch it up again.

One thing was certain, that Aaron's unhappy love had a wondrous effect on his poetry, for never before did he write such charming verse. One poem attracted the attention of the editor of a magazine, who actually asked Aaron to send him more of the same thing—a piece of luck which never happened to me; but then I have not the genius of Aaron. Other poems he did write, and with success—so much so, that he had a chance of bringing out a small volume of verse, a small, thin, green volume called "Rose Dreamings," which was highly spoken of. Thus did his success begin from the time he broke his heart, which proves to me that Fate never gives us one thing without taking away another in revenge. "She gave Aaron fame, and she took from him happiness; and great as he is now in the world of poetry, yet I do not envy him, for I know 'twas the mistake of his life, when he went hunting the Muse, to have missed Erato and found Terpsichore.

There was one poem in that thin volume which attracted much attention; but none knew the truth of its bitterness so well as I, who had watched the breaking of the poet's heart. Aaron idealized the passion which had wrecked his happiness. He passed over her profession of a dancer; he spoke of other scenes, other fate; but when I read this poem I knew well that under a thin veil of verse the poet sang of that ignoble passion which had ruined his life.

THE DEAD MISTRESS.

Dead! she is dead! with her white face smileless,
Face that was never without a smile;
Strange! as a child, she looks pure and guileless,
Yet was her heart but a thing of guile.

Only last week did I hear her warble,
Dancing so merrily, never at rest:
Now she is lying, as carved in marble,
Pale hands clasped on the placid breast.

Prayers for repose of her soul they are saying,
Ere she is buried beneath the sod;
Oh, what a farce is this idle praying—
Praying for one who forgot her God!

Dead! in the pride of her evil beauty,
She that so loved in the light to dwell!
Never a thought did she give to duty;
Self was her god, and she worshipped well.

Loved her? Yes, I adored her!—that is,
Just as we men of the world adore;
I saw her face at a rose-wreathed lattice,
Somewhere in France, in the days of yore.

We met! her lover the world then called me,
And for a time we were fond and true;
Then I grew weary, her light chains galled me,
So to each other we bade adieu..

She only cared for the world's gay pleasures,
Sorrow and shame she behind her cast;
Hearts she has broken, and wasted treasures:
Well! but the reckoning has come at last.

WHEN I LIVED IN BOHEMIA.

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Come! nay, hold! I would have some tresses,
A golden ringlet, before I go;
Just to recall me her sweet caresses,
And those dead hours when I loved her so.

Now no longer her kiss delights me,
Others are fair, with the self-same sins.
Come, I must go, for the feast invites me;
Old love 's dead, and the new begins.

11

CHAPTER IX.

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST.

No! I am not going to copy out the chapter of Daniel regarding that most unlucky dinner, but rather intend giving a modern transcript of the same, particularly as concerns the handwriting on the wall. Yet think not that such caligraphy will in any way be the outcome of Spiritualism, or that I desire to enlist the society of spirit-rappers for such manifestation! By no means. The origin of this wall-scribbling was very prosaic, yet it carried as much dismay into our midst as though it had indeed been supernatural; *it made us doubt Mrs. Prass*. Italics, Mr. Printer, if you please, for the phrase is noteworthy, as to doubt Mrs. Prass—good, kind, long-suffering Sophia—was to strike at the very root of our system of boarding-house government. 'Twas Christmas time, too, and that was cruellest of all. To think that at such a traditionally happy period Mrs. Prass should have chosen to harrow our bosoms and destroy our belief in human nature, it was too much; and yet she was responsible for that scratchy handwriting on the wall, which told Lionel Amber-ton, in bad English, that his kingdom, his little Babylon, his hanging-garden of a garret was about to pass away from him. 'Twas ill done, Sophia Prass, to betray our confidence in this way; and though your name does signify "Wisdom," yet on

this occasion you forgot to act up to the meaning of your admirable cognomen.

Indirectly, 'twas through Signor Bianco, *née* White, that such calamity came about; for had not that pseudo Italian made an unexpected success in his profession, he would not have given a feast in the garret of Lionel Amberton; and had not such a feast taken place in such garret, Mrs. Prass would not have waxed wrathful, nor caused that outburst of subterranean fire which, ascending unexpectedly from kitchendom, played the deuce with us poor dwellers on the housetops. Therefore I blame the signor. He acted with the best intentions, but he acted wrongly, and was responsible for the feast, the handwriting on the wall, the wrath of Mrs. Prass, and many other calamities.

What is the correct method of voice production? I wish I knew; for then would I tell the world, and settle a vexed question; but, by the larynx of Mario! there are as many systems as there are teachers. According to A, his system—which is constructed of the fragments of other systems—is perfect, and so his pupils believe it to be, until he spoils a few organs or so, when they curse A and go to B, whom they think will turn them out Grisis, Pattis, Marios, etc. B's system is the reverse of A's; and the pupil, having unlearned as much as he can of A's precepts, starts to assimilate the new method, which proves so perplexing that, in dismay, he takes to C's idea of vocal training. If he escapes C, he certainly falls into the clutches of D, and so on through the whole alphabet, every letter of which is correct in his teaching. "Breathe with the lower part of the lung," says one;

“Inflate the upper part of the lung,” says another; “Hit the roof of the mouth with the voice;” “Don’t hit the roof of the mouth, but send the voice against the teeth;” “Feel as though you were swallowing your notes.” “Send out your notes as if they were flying from you.” Lord! who is to find the truth in all this multiplicity of directions? Signor Bianco, who had been through it all, made my head whirl with the descriptions he gave of his difficulties. Every teacher had shifted his breathing apparatus into a fresh place, until his inside was in a state of topsy-turvy. The main thing, however, in singing seems to me to be, that the singer have a big voice, so that every teacher can work his wicked will on it; and after years of incessant wearing, filing down, and suppression, you may come out with what can by courtesy be called a singing voice.

But Belshazzar’s feast?

Well, I am coming to that; but first I must tell you about the voice of Signor Bianco, which provided the money for that same feast. Our Mario had naturally a fine organ, and after submitting it to the tender mercies of several teachers, he managed, by putting all he learned together, to promulgate a method which he applied to his own voice and found successful. He sang very well, yet still was in the chorus at Covent Garden; and becoming tired of this, migrated to a comic-opera theatre, where he managed to secure a minor part. It was so small that no one took any notice of him nor of his voice, until one night the tenor of the opera fell ill, and the signor was called on to supply his place, which he did so well that he secured the part to himself for

the remainder of the season. Being romantic-looking, the ladies all fell in love with him, while his undeniably fine voice and method of singing charmed the critics; therefore our Mario made the success for which he had been waiting for so long, and gave a party to celebrate the event. Lionel's room was the largest, being quite of palatial dimensions; and on Christmas Eve we were all invited to a banquet and a Santa Claus tree.

Without doubt the outlay was lavish—the viands were excellent, nor was there any stint of beer, whiskey, and such-like generous liquids—so by twelve o'clock we were all in a high state of glee, merry as crickets in harvest-time, and quite as noisy. The signor made an excellent host, but at times was somewhat absent-minded, as it was his last night in Bohemia. Yes; a nightingale with such a salary could no longer nest with Mrs. Prass; therefore were his boxes ready in his garret to be taken away at morning's light. For the last time he would sleep therein; for the last time he would enjoy our revelry, so akin to tears; and on the morrow Signor Bianco, *née* White, would be a grub no longer, but, spreading



"BEING ROMANTIC-LOOKING."

his bank-note wings, would soar, singing—a vocal butterfly, if such a thing is possible—into the sky, to be admired by all. For my part, I wonder not that he was sad; for melancholy as his experiences of Prague had been, yet 'twas a wrench to leave that city of ambition; and bright though looked the future, who knew if that brightness would last? A slight cold, a trifling illness, and our singing-bird's voice would cease, his wings close, and down he would drop again to those depths from which he was now mounting. Avaunt such croakings! Let us be optimists; let us look on the bright side of things, and send away Signor Bianco with a smile on his face and hope in his heart.

Meanwhile Aaron was reading a few verses appropriate to the season, which were an echo of Villon, and went pessimistically thus:

A BALLAD OF 'XMAS.

I.

A season of good-will and peace,
 Supposed to cure all teen and fret,
 When quarrels for the moment cease,
 And families all their jars forget;
 With welcome is it ever met—
 The church bells ring their merry chime,
 There's naught but pleasantness—and yet
 How tired we are of 'Xmas time!

II.

The festive pudding crowns the board,
 October ales begin to flow;
 The maiden, by her love adored,
 Is kissed beneath the mistletoe;

Away we banish tears and woe.
And cheer our hearts with thoughts sublime ;
But, ah ! within our breasts we know
How tired we are of 'Xmas time.

III.

We know that every year will bring
The merry clown we loved of yore,
The carols which the paupers sing
With tuneless throats from door to door,
The "good-will" sermon preached before,
The "old grange" picture with its rhyme,
Till in despair we say once more,
How tired we are of Xmas time !

Envoi.

Ah, Prince ! we are not brave in sooth,
And honest speaking is a crime ;
Else would we boldly tell the truth,
How tired we are of 'Xmas time !

This heretical effusion was received with murmurs of disapproval.

"Disbelieving Jew!" cried Eugene, smiting Aaron on the back. "What dost thou know of our Christian festival?"

"Enough to make me dread its yearly occurrence," retorted Aaron grimly. "If there were any soul in the thing, I would not mind; but it is all holly and humbug. The only human beings that believe in Christmas as Christmas are children. Clergymen preach 'peace and good-will sermons,' when they know perfectly well there is not a scrap of either to be found in the whole of their congregations. At Christmas every one feigns a happiness he does not feel; it's all pretence. Why, the other day I saw

in the paper that a man was fined for kissing a woman under the mistletoe, and yet people hang it up in their houses and talk rubbish about the good old custom—a good old custom which leads to being fined for keeping it up. Away with such make-believes! Christmas is as dead as a door-nail, in spite of Dickens and his ‘Carol.’ Instead of holly, we ought to hang up rue and gray rosemary for bitter remembrance. I am a Jew, you are all Gentiles; but I would rather keep and believe in my Passover, which has some significance, than in your ghost-of-a-dead-faith festival called Christmas, which Anglicism is trying so hard to raise from its mediæval grave. *Dixi*, I have said.”

“And said badly!” cried I, wrathful at this tirade against Yuletide. “Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale? Do you think that we will give up Christmas because you find it not to your taste? No, by St. Nicholas! For such heresy you deserve no present off the Christmas tree.”

“Oh, by the way, where is the Christmas tree?” asked Eugene, turning to our host.

“All in good time. Midnight! At that mystic hour will the prizes be distributed.”

“Good heavens, signor! why this reckless extravagance?”

“’Tis my farewell to Bohemia.”

“Lucky man! you have been successful?”

“By the merest chance,” replied the signor, with a sigh. “Success in London does not depend upon the capability of doing a thing. True, one must have the brains, so as to be ready when the chance

comes; but brains alone will not bring the chance. Had that tenor not fallen ill, I might still have been in the depths with my much-praised voice, and never a soul would have discovered me."

"Very true!" said Eugene bitterly. "In my early stages of Bohemianism I thought that good work would bring its reward; but, alas! I find it does not. Novelty is what the public of to-day desire, and if they can't get that they will not have anything else."

"And the novelty must be foreign," said the signor, with a sneer. "The B. P. always believe in your foreign artist before all. Madame This and Signor That have some chance of success; but, alas! for Mr. or Miss who try to earn a livelihood in their own land—in nine cases out of ten they fail. What a pity we are not all born Germans! We should then be in favor with the court and with the populace."

"A truce to this grumbling!" cried I, quite out of patience with such conversation. "This is Christmas time, and we must all be merry."

"Humbug!" groaned Aaron, savagely. "What have we got to be merry about?"

"A good dinner, for one thing. You don't get that every day."

"Nor a Christmas tree, either," said the signor, twitching down a mysterious curtain which veiled a corner of the room. "Behold!"

In truth it was a most splendid Christmas tree, nor had the signor spared any expense as regards tinsel, candles, bon-bons, and sweets for its adornment. Such a sight had not been seen in Lionel's garret for many a weary day. In fact, I doubt if its

roof had ever before covered a Christmas tree. We all stood around like a throng of curious children, and paid the signor the finest compliments in the world



“BEHOLD!”

with regard to his taste as displayed by that fir tree and its adornments. It will doubtless seem strange that a number of clever men should be so amused at

such childishness; still it is sweet to play the fool at the proper time, as the Latin adage hath it; and our lives were, as a rule, so barren of pleasure, that this glittering tree and its childish adornments gave us a sense of great satisfaction. Our first rapture having subsided, we placed the tree in a position where it could be seen to the best advantage, and, having lighted all the many-colored tapers, admired the brilliant effect thus produced. Then Lionel, as the owner of the garret, brewed a large bowl of punch, which filled the room with its pungent odors, and made us think of jolly monks, the wassail bowl, Old King Cole, and all manner of incongruous things suggestive of the Christmas of romance.

"Well, signor," said Eugene, when he held a full cup of this delectable beverage under his nose, "here's your very good health, and may you get a bank-note for every throat-note you let out!"

The signor bowed in the Italian fashion, and sang a verse of "Auld Lang Syne," in the chorus of which we all joined with a vigor which nearly brought down the roof. 'Twas but a crew of noisy bacchanals thundering out the old ditty, and yet I felt a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes as I joined in with the rest. There is no memory-evoker like that melody; and the last time I heard it sung—but there! to tell that would send me off at a tangent, and take me away from this description of Belshazzar's feast and its sad conclusion.

Having finished the Scotch melody, we all drank each other's healths; and having brewed a fresh bowl of punch—for the first one was soon exhausted—the signor proceeded to distribute the prizes.

Ah, that kindly-hearted nightingale! He knew that nothing would be so acceptable to us as gifts of money, and so, for the most part, from off that tree we received the golden fruit of the Hesperides in the form of half-a-sovereign each.

"I thought it best to let you buy your own presents," said the signor artfully; "for I had not the slightest idea as to your several tastes, except Lionel's. I knew what he wanted."

Lionel, who had received no golden apple, and was much astonished at the omission, looked up inquiringly, and saw that the signor was holding out to him an envelope.



"AND OPENED IT
SLOWLY."

"You remember, Lionel," said the signor quietly, "that you gave me one of your manuscripts to look over. Well, I took it to a friend of mine, who showed it to Chelmsford & Co., the publishers, and they wrote to me about it. You will find what they say in this letter."

Lionel, who is of an extremely emotional temperament, turned first red and then pale, after which he took the envelope from the hand of the signor, and opened it slowly. We all waited with bated breath to hear the contents, as letters from publishers were rare among us, being chiefly confined to printed slips containing polite rejection of MSS. This letter, however, con-

tained news of a different nature, judging from the expression of delight which overspread the face of Lionel, who made himself master of the contents, and then shook the signor violently by the hand.

"Thank you, White!" he said in a husky voice. "You have done more for me than I ever dared to hope for."

As a matter of fact, the letter contained an offer from Messrs. Chelmsford & Co.—extremely nasty publishers, who will not look at my work—for Lionel's book; in plain English, they agreed to publish his book and pay him for such publication—a piece of good fortune, which we all found it somewhat difficult to believe. I doubt not, had the signor remained, he would have been overwhelmed by us all with entreaties to get our MSS. accepted, our pictures hung, our songs sung, etc.; but as he was going away, there was no chance of him being worried out of his life, so all we could do was to congratulate Lionel loudly on his good fortune, and drink his health, coupled with that of Signor Bianco.

In fact so many healths were drunk on that notable night that I am afraid we began to double the lights on the Christmas tree; but, then, one does not lose a good-hearted comrade every day, and we were anxious to prove our friendship by our powers of absorption. 'Twas Yuletide, too, and, in spite of Aaron and his croakings, we felt much inclined to sentimental belief in human nature, the more so as Lionel's good fortune had almost made us believe in publishers. As to Lionel himself, he looked upon his fortune as made, notwithstanding that the public had yet to pronounce a verdict on his work; but with

that sublime egotism of genius which makes it fight against almost unconquerable obstacles, he never for a moment doubted but that the verdict would be in his favor. Archimedes' remark anent a resting-place for his world-moving lever certainly applied to Lionel; for his novel was his lever, the publishers his resting-place for such lever, and he had fully made up his mind that if it did not move the world itself, it would move the hearts of the world's inhabitants. Therefore, with this idea—pardonable enough surely under the circumstances—Lionel was perfectly happy, and all was going merry as a marriage bell, when the catastrophe occurred which shattered our belief in Mrs. Prass, and made us miserable.

With the illumination of the Christmas tree all the corners of the room, hitherto somewhat dark, became visible; and it was while poking about in one of these that Reginald, who was always very curious about other people's business, made a startling discovery.

"Your good luck has just come in time, Lionel," he said, pointing to a paper pinned up on the wall; "for if you don't pay Mrs. Prass, she intends to turn you out."

This statement was received with a laugh of derision. What! Mrs. Prass turn any one of us out—rent or no rent? Impossible! Other landladies doubtless were obdurate to the extent of evicting their non-paying tenants, but not Mrs. Prass. Sooner would the heavens fall than the milk of human kindness in the breast of our Sophia turn sour.

"You don't believe me?" said Reginald complacently. "Well, then, look at this notice! The writ-

ing is bad, and so are the contents; nor will a perusal of the same strengthen your belief that Mrs. Prass is better than her neighbors."

'Twas the handwriting on the wall which startled us quite as much as it did King Belshazzar and his lords, and we all rushed in a body to convince our own eyes. Alas! 'twas only too true; for we found



"WELL, THEN, LOOK AT THIS NOTICE!"

it to be a formal notice, directed to Lionel Amberton, Esquire, advising him that if he did not pay his rent the next day—Christmas Day—that he would have to clear out, bag and baggage. Having thus read the handwriting on the wall—for the expounding of which no Daniel was needed—we all sat down again, and gazed with blank faces the one at the other.

'Twas not entirely on Lionel's account; but the fact is, we were all in the same predicament, and dreaded lest each of our humble rooms should contain the same announcement in scratchy handwriting.

"Well, I would not have believed it of Mrs. Prass," said Eugene dolefully.

"Nor I. I thought Mrs. Prass, like Cæsar's wife, was above suspicion."

"She has shattered my belief in human nature."

"And at Christmas time, too!"

"*Hinc illæ lachrymæ.*"

Thus did we sigh and moan over the decadence of our fortunes, which had turned our merry Christmas meeting into an assemblage of cynical mutes. Resolved to know the worst, I went out to have a look at all the other rooms wherein we severally lived, and returned speedily with the most disheartening intelligence:

"There's a notice to quit in every room except the signor's!"

A cry of wrath ascended to Heaven at this announcement, and we all fell into the most dismal state. All of us owed several weeks' rent, yet none of us could pay, nor did there seem any prospect of paying, for at least some considerable time. It was no use, however, bemoaning our hard fate, which seemed likely to render us homeless on Christmas Day; so we resolved to take the bull by the horns, and summon Mrs. Prass up from the kitchen to give a reason for thus harrowing our bosoms on such a festive occasion. Accordingly Aaron, who had the most persuasive tongue of us all, descended, and speedily returned with Sophia in tow; but, alas! not



"NOW IT AIN'T NO USE, GENTLEMEN."

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the mild-looking Sophia we were in the habit of seeing daily, but a hard-featured female with a flinty heart, who suddenly darted into our midst and began talking at once:

"Now it ain't no use, gentlemen, your trying to talk me down, cause I ain't agoin' to do anything other than what I've said. I've got rent and taxes to pay; and if you gentlemen don't give me money for my rooms, what am I to do? My landlord won't wait, so you can't expect me to wait. I'm a poor widow, gentlemen, and I don't like being taken in; so you've all got notice, and if you don't pay you'll have to quit, an' that's all about it. An' if I," etc., etc.

It was no use trying to stem the torrent of Mrs. Prass' eloquence when she began in this vein, so not one of us said a word, but all sat around our voluble Sophia, and looked reproachfully at her. Mrs. Prass was prepared to be abused, to be even sworn at; but our silence was too much for her, and she began to falter in her carefully-prepared oration.

"I'm sure, gentlemen, I ain't no wish to be hard on you; but what am I to do?"

"Do?" said I, constituting myself the mouthpiece of the assemblage. "Why, give us time to pay, of course."

"And on what date, sir, if I may be so bold," asked Mrs. Prass with freezing politeness, "will you pay your little accounts?"

"Oh! on the 29th of February."

"Which leap-year ain't for another twelve months. No, gentlemen, you pay or you go."

"Then we go!"

Mrs. Prass was not prepared for this announcement of a general exodus, and began to whimper:

"Oh, gentlemen, I hope you won't! However will I get my rooms filled?"

"Never, if you put up notices like this," said Eugene, pointing to the handwriting on the wall. "Mrs. Prass, I am ashamed of you—destroying our faith in human nature in this way!"

Mrs. Prass began to display symptoms of hysteria, and had to be comforted with a glass of punch, after which she retired much softened, but nevertheless advised us all to pay our rents or give up possession of the rooms.

Never on this earth was there such a sad assemblage as retired to repose on that night; for we foresaw but a melancholy year before us. I tossed and turned all night on my uneasy bed, wondering how I was to find the sum of twenty shillings in order to satisfy the rapacity of Mrs. Prass, but no means of making that sum presented itself to my disordered imagination; so at length, toward the morning, I fell into a fitful slumber, resolved to try and soften Sophia if possible at dawn.

To my astonishment, however, such desperate resolve was not necessary; for Mrs. Prass presented herself at my door with a smiling face and told me the signor desired to see me in Mr. Amberton's room. Thither I went, and found all the company of the previous night assembled; and when we were all reduced to something like order, Signor Bianco, *née* White, made a speech, in which he told us he had settled with Mrs. Prass for our rents in a way satisfactory to that lady, so that the notices in our several

garrets were now null and void, and we could all remain tenants of Mrs. Prass for the next month or so.

How the signor escaped being smothered with the embraces he received for this piece of Good Samaritanism, I do not know; for we all literally fell on him and shook his arms nearly off, after which we drank his health, and saw him and his baggage off the premises. He departed in a four-wheeler for his new lodgings and new life, but behind him—kindly soul as he was—he left a contented crew, who were thus once more saved from arrest. The feast of Belshazzar had come to an end, but luckier were we than that monarch; for the handwriting on the wall, which warned us that our kingdoms were about to be taken from us, proved false, thanks to the generosity of the signor. But we never believed in Mrs. Prass again. We saw that she was like other landladies; and that when it came to a choice of us or the rent, we should have to give way, and either pay or go. 'Twas but another illusion vanished, and I never now see a Christmas tree—which I did, by the way, last Yuletide at Eugene's—without recalling that feast and the handwriting on the wall, which upset us all so much.

As to the signor, he made a great success as a singer, and surely he deserved it, both for his perseverance and his kindness of heart. In another part of these sketches I think I told the end of our nightingale, who, alas! was not prosperous during the whole of his career; for if he made money and gained fame, he was unhappy in his love affairs, which is simply another example of the law of com-

pensation. In truth, those whom I knew and loved in Bohemia were very unfortunate. Mark Trevenna, who vanished I know not where; Aaron, nursing his broken heart with everything in the world to satisfy him, save happiness; Signor Bianco, lying dead in a foreign land, with his golden voice stilled forever; and Rax, with his life-long sorrow, which spoke in every note he drew from his violin. Do you not think this sad? Alas! life is always sad, especially Bohemian life. I would fain make these sketches merry; and, indeed, I began to write them with such intent, but my pen refused to write other than the truth, therefore these pages are not cheerful. Now and again there is indeed a gleam of sunshine, but 'tis wintry and evanescent, and the mirth is forced—the mirth of Lear's fool, which but veils sorrow. Enough, I will distress you no longer with such sadness; but if your heart is attuned to melancholy, I would fain read you the poem which Aaron wrote on hearing of the death of the signor. 'Tis not in our poet's published works, and was but written and sent to me in remembrance of that feast of Belshazzar, whereof I have told you the doings in the foregoing pages.

THE DEAD NIGHTINGALE.

My nightingale, you sing no more
 When glimmers moonlight chill and pale;
 Thy golden notes no longer pour
 In triumph through the dusky vale.

The thickets dark no longer thrill
 Melodious with thy liquid notes,
 Nor ever o'er the windy hill
 Thy wild complaint in music floats.

To lands serener hast thou gone,
Where nearer earth pale Dian beams,
As though thou wert Endymion,
And called the goddess in thy dreams.

Or hast thou fled to woo the rose
In Eastern lands with passion strong,
Where lovers, mindful of their woes,
Find mournful meanings in thy song?

Beside the coppice hushed I wait,
And, longing, hold my breath to hear
Thee calling to thy silent mate,
Who songless haunts the greenwood near.

I would such fancies I could feign,
That thou but for a time wert fled ;
But well I know such thoughts are vain,
For at my feet thou liest dead.

Unhappy bird ! what Fate forlorn
Robbed thee of thy melodious breath?
You sang, breast placed against a thorn,
And singing, sang yourself to death !

CHAPTER X.

DEAD SEA FRUIT.

THERE is nothing so much hated by the public as a versatile man. If A writes sensational novels, let him do so until the end of his days; but let him not attempt to string verses together, and call such stringing "poetry." If B elected to compose oratorio, let him hold fast to his sacred strains, and not strive to give a comic opera to the world. Nature has gifted every bird with but one voice—its own; and, according to public opinion, a man, writer, composer, or artist—should keep to his own special line. The advocates of this narrow-minded theory, however, seem to forget that nature has given the mocking-bird the capacity of imitating and emulating the notes of other birds; and, in like manner, a man of talent may be able to write at once novels, poems, essays, and such-like things, all equally well. Whether the public or the critics admit this fact, I do not know; but this I do know, and am certain of, that he who is successful in one line is rarely successful in another—not because he has not the capabilities for that other line, but simply because the public will not accept him otherwise than in the fashion in which he makes his first success.

These sentiments were not originally my own, although now I subscribe to them. No! they came from the mouth of Lionel Amberton, on the eve of

his great success as a literary man. He was sitting in my room talking over his good fortune in having a novel accepted by Chelmsford & Co., and was actually deliberating as to whether it would be wise of him to take advantage of their offer. Ridiculous! of course it was. Here was a man who knew what poverty was, who by the merest chance in the world had obtained an opportunity of placing his work before the public, and yet he hesitated to take advantage of his good fortune! At first I laughed at his scruples; but now I recognize that Lionel was only too correct in his surmise, and that the success of his first novel, by committing him to a special line of fiction, placed him far below the position he had a right to occupy as a writer.

"I know it sounds idiotic," said Lionel, in answer to my remonstrances; "but it is true what I say. This book which Chelmsford & Co. have accepted is a catch-penny, written to sell; and if it makes a success no one will believe that I can do any better."

"Then why not write a better book?"

"Because Chelmsford & Co. will not accept it. I have seen them, and know their sentiments thoroughly. They are simply business men, who look at brains, not from an artistic or literary point of view, but only as a means of making money. I have several stories better than this sensational rubbish they now hold; but they will not look at them, because they think this book has the elements of success and the others have not. Of course they have not read the others, but it's no use trying to argue with them on that ground; a publisher, like the king, can do no wrong in his own eyes. They

offer to publish 'The Case of Mr. Judd' on terms very advantageous to themselves; and if I don't accept, they will have nothing to do with me."

"But if you think that such a book will do you harm, why publish it? Why not wait for another chance?"

Lionel sighed and dropped his head on his hand.

"Beggars cannot be choosers. I want to make a success, because I want money."

"We all want money; but if you remain true to your artistic feelings——"

"If I do, I will lose my cousin."

"Your cousin?"

"Did I not tell you I was in love?" observed Amberton, laughing. "Yes, it is true, I am in love with my cousin Lillian; but her father would never consent to my becoming engaged to her unless I made sufficient money to keep her—that, of course, is only natural, even from a paternal point of view. Hitherto, as you know, I have had no chance of making a success; but now, if the Fates are kind, I may make a position as a sensational writer which will enable me to marry my cousin; but by doing this I sacrifice my artistic career."

"Will not your cousin Lillian wait?"

"She cannot. Some rich old man is courting her, and if I do not marry her soon, she will be lost to me forever."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"I don't know; I'm between the devil and the deep sea. If I refuse this offer for 'The Case of Mr. Judd,' I lose Lillian; if I accept it, I may make a big success financially, and will forever lose the posi-

tion I ought to occupy as a writer. It sounds conceited, that last half of the remark, doesn't it? But I know my own powers."

"But if you do good work after this, you will be accepted according to your writings."

"My good fellow, I tell you it is impossible. If I start with 'Mr. Judd,' I must go on with him. The British public ticket a man with the name of his first success and will not admit he can do anything else."

"I don't agree with you. Good work always tells in the end."

"Sometimes! I do not say there is not a chance; but remember that against stupidity even the gods fight in vain. Now I'm going to sleep on the subject, and will inform you on the morrow what I decide to do. But I tell you, Peter, as sure as you sit there, that if I make a success with 'Mr. Judd,' I will marry my cousin before the end of the year, and remain a writer of shilling shockers until the end of my days."

I laughed to scorn this dreary prophecy, and, truth to tell, had the affair happened to myself, would have been willing to barter my high-flown ideas about art for the sake of making a good income. But Lionel was artistic, and it went to his soul to think that work unworthy of him should leave his hand. The question was simply this: "Did he love his cousin or his art?" For my part, I settled the question in my own mind long before I went to sleep.

"He will marry his cousin," I said sagaciously, and, sure enough, subsequent events proved that I was right in so deciding.

As to the success of "The Case of Mr. Judd," I need not say anything about that, for every one knows the sensation which that clever novel made. For once in their lives, Messrs. Chelmsford and Co. picked out a popular success in manuscript; and a good thing they made by such astuteness—much better, indeed, than the author, who had to be content with a comparatively small sum. However, the success of 'Mr. Judd' made his name as a writer of sensational literature; and he was besieged with offers for another book of the same class. Then it was that I saw how truly Lionel had spoken when he said his first success condemned him to the one style of writing; for although he received many excellent offers for another sensational novel, yet not one of the London publishers would accept any other kind of work at his hand.

"You see," said Lionel to me when we were speaking about this, "I was right in what I said. I can write as many books as I like of the 'Mr. Judd' kind; but if I attempt anything of the higher class, I shall have the critics down on me, and the public will refuse to read it as out of my line."

However, as he had made the plunge it was no use crying over spilt milk, and he resolved to continue writing what the public demanded of him, so as to secure a sufficient income on which to marry his cousin. He therefore wrote his second book, for which he received a large sum of money, on the strength of his first success; and of course the critics, as usual, said that it was not so good as "Mr. Judd." Critics always say this about an author's second book. Why, I don't know, unless it is that they

fancy he puts forward earlier work as quickly as possible, so as to make money. My poor Lionel, however, had taken a great deal of pains over the successor to "Mr. Judd," and it annoyed him dreadfully to find the critics abuse what was certainly the better work of the two, simply because it came before the public after his first success. However, he made a lot of money out of his second book, and married his cousin; so if he did not get his heart's desire—which, by the way, no one ever does get—he certainly had as fair a share of happiness as he could expect in this troublesome world.

I called on Mr. and Mrs. Amberton at their modest little cottage near Hampstead, and spent there a very pleasant afternoon. Little Mrs. Lillian was a charming blonde, full of vivacity and very proud of her clever husband. She knew nothing about literature, and infinitely preferred Lionel's sensational novels, which brought him in such a lot of money, to the high-class work which he was always lamenting he could not get published.

"I can't understand Lionel not being satisfied," she said to me, while Amberton was raging up and down the room at his failure to get good work before the public. "I think his stories are splendid. Every



"A CHARMING
BLONDE."

one says they are, and he gets lots of money for them; so I think he ought to be quite happy."

"Well, you see, Mrs. Amberton, these novels bring money; but do not satisfy Lionel's artistic soul."

"I'm sure half the world have not got artistic souls, and don't want to be satisfied," said Mrs. Amberton with supreme contempt. "I may be wrong, but I would rather write a thing that paid than a thing that didn't. There's poetry, for instance: Lionel is always wanting to publish his poetry. Well, no one will take it up, and though I think it beautiful, I'm sure very few people would read it if it were published. Besides," she finished frankly, "he wouldn't get any money for it."

I laughed at this latter part of her speech, and wondered how it was that women were so much more practical than men. A man may lose the substance for the shadow—a woman, never; and if men were less conceited as a rule and took the advice of their womankind, in nine cases out of ten they would find such feminine counsel to be excellent. For my part, when I am in doubt, I always consult my wife, and I have never yet had cause to repent doing so. Little Mrs. Amberton was very plain-spoken over Lionel's literary success, and doubtless made him wince by telling the truth; for your literary man requires to be let down gently—but her advice was certainly to the point, and I, for one, wish Lionel had been wise enough to have taken it.

Meanwhile, Lionel's success, which we all envied so much, was gradually souring his temper and turning him from a merry, light-hearted fellow into a crabbed misanthrope. He would not go out into



"I THINK HE OUGHT TO BE QUITE HAPPY."

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society, although he received many invitations, simply because he thought he had done nothing worthy of himself, and was always fretting over the compliments he received for his published novels. It was no use his saying they were pot-boilers, and that he did not care for them himself, for no one believed him; and people's polite refusals to accept his depreciation of his own work as serious goaded the poor young man into a perfect frenzy. Whenever he was spoken of in the papers he was referred to as the author of "Mr. Judd," and many people, not knowing he had published other works, used to compliment him on it for months after the book was dead and forgotten. They thought "Mr. Judd" was the Alpha and Omega of his published works, though he was turning out a new novel, in shilling form, every six months.

"I'll never get rid of 'Mr. Judd,' he groaned to me one day; "that wretched book is the only one I shall ever be known to be the author of. I might write a play like Shakespeare, or a novel like George Eliot, and all that would be said is: 'Oh! it is not half so good as "Mr. Judd."' I wish I had died before I had written that novel."

"If you had you could not have married Mrs. Amberton."

"No! That's the only good turn 'Mr. Judd' ever did me; but I am afraid if things go on much longer, I shall have to fly to the uttermost ends of the earth."

"If you do you'll find some one to compliment you on your book there. You quite forget that 'Mr. Judd' is ubiquitous."

Lionel groaned in sheer soreness of heart; for the

very mention of "Mr. Judd" was gall and worm-wood to his artistic soul.

"I suppose you see what the papers say about me?" he said, after a pause.

"Well, I see they do not speak of you so well as they might," said I cautiously.

"My good fellow, it is very good of you to gloss the thing over like that; but you know as well as I do that I am the best-abused man in the three kingdoms."

"And the most successful, financially speaking."

"I do not deny that I make money out of those detective stories—it's the only consolation I have in the whole business; but the contemptuous way in which I am spoken of nearly drives me out of my mind. Every paper in London has told me that my books are not literature. Hang it! I know that as well as they do; but I am not permitted to do anything better. The publishers will not accept that analytic novel I wrote the other day; and if I did get it published, the critics would say I had undertaken more than I could do. I sent a book of classical stories—after the style of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, you know—to a big firm the other day, and they wrote back that they would be glad to take a detective story from me; but that they feared such high-class work was beyond my powers. Oh, it is cruel, cruel! I have to go on writing what I know is not good and yet be blamed and abused for it, simply because I happen to have made my first success in that line."

"It is hard, I admit."

"Look at my poems! Every one laughs at the

idea of a shilling-shockist writing poems, and yet I know they are good. I am more of a poet than anything else; but I dare not publish them: the publishers, the critics, the public—not one of the three would accept me seriously. I'll have to go on constructing Chinese puzzles to the end of my days."

"Well, the Chinese puzzles sell."

"I know that. I would not write them if they did not; but look at the way I am abused for writing them! As if it were easy to write a detective novel. Ah! the critics don't know how difficult it is! Look here," went on Lionel, planting himself in front of me; "if you write a novel dealing with the emotions only, you can put in what you like and no one can contradict you, for you may have felt the particular emotion you write about, although your reader may not. But if you write a detective novel, you state a hard and fast criminal case, and in order to carry it out to a logical conclusion, you are as bound by that case as though it actually happened. Then you must have all police-court business at your finger's ends, be well up in legal matters, know something about the medical profession, and be careful in every statement you make. You must conceal the real criminal, lay the blame on all the other characters in the book; yet, when the end comes, you have to prove that it is quite natural the real criminal should have committed the crime. Look at all the work, observation, logic, analysis, and memory involved in the writing of such a book; and yet when it is done and presents a perfect picture of a difficult criminal case, then critics dismiss it with the contemptuous remark 'that it is a shilling shocker!'"

“ Ah! now you are defending what you affect to despise.”

“ Pardon me! I don't despise my work—it's good of its kind; but I admit it is not high-class, and I wish to do something really worthy of my brain. Still, my detective novels merit kinder treatment than they receive, if only on account of the labor in constructing and working out such intricate plots; but it is the fashion to abuse such stories, and I must take the consequences of writing them.”

Of course it was no use arguing with a man who looked at things in such a dreary light; but I must admit my sympathies were very much with Lionel. I knew of what excellent work he was capable, and it was hard that he should be kept writing what he felt was unworthy of his talents, simply because the public, the publishers, and the critics willed it so. So far as money was concerned he had nothing to complain of, as the public liked his sensational novels, thought them cheap at a shilling, and bought them readily; but among literary men he had no place. When the papers quoted writers of the day, they studiously avoided the name of Amberton; and when any special class of book was required to illustrate the degradation of literature in the Victorian age, Lionel's novels were always taken as the most brilliant example of the garbage upon which the public fed. The *Saturday Review* turned him into ridicule, the minor papers sneered at his attempts to put good work between the garish covers of a novel, price one shilling; and altogether Lionel Amberton was made a kind of literary scape-goat to bear the sins of his generation.

The poor lad was terribly put about at the unpleasant position he occupied: he could not stop writing, or his income would cease and his wife would lack bread; and if he went on writing he could only, under compulsion, produce books of the class of "Mr. Judd," every new one of which was received with storms of abuse from the papers. Yet these very same papers which deprecated the "spread of criminal literature" were full of the garbage of the divorce court, printed at full length, and which for foulness exceeded anything Lionel had ever written in his life. His books were sensational certainly, but not suggestive: he offended no one's morals—not even those of the young person of seventeen—by going to the gutter for incidents; yet his works were spoken of as degrading to literature, while three-volume novels written by hysterical women and crammed full of prurience, carefully hidden in polite English, were admired for their purity of sentiment and brilliance of style. Oh, what a nation of humbugs we are! As long as a pill is sugar-coated we swallow it. We pretend things do not exist which flourish openly in our midst, and send Bibles, missionaries, tracts, and money to savages who, in the main, are better than the savages who inhabit the slums of London. Yet, if such a thing be written about in a novel, the critics call it "sham sentiment" of the Dickens type.

However, Lionel, in spite of his indignation at the injustice with which he was treated, could do nothing. To go against the press would be like throwing feathers at a granite image with intent to harm it. He was classified, ticketed, and catalogued as a writer

of sensational stories, so it was beyond his power to rise from the depths into which he had been cast against his will. At last, in despair, he took a resolution and communicated it to me.

"I am going to publish my novel, 'The Parasite,' and my book of poems," he said resolutely, "at my own cost and under my own name of Lionel Amber-ton. If the critics and the public give me a fair chance of proving myself a capable writer and accept my work, I shall be encouraged and go on working. If not——"

"Well?" I asked curiously; for he was silently looking out of the window with a strange expression on his face.

"If not, I will take the remnants of my fortune and emigrate to the colonies."

"What—give up your career?"

"Yes! and I will give it up without regret. I will take up farming in New Zealand, and only write for my own amusement."

"How Quixotic!"

"But how necessary! I tell you I cannot go on living like this, the butt for every one to throw darts at—the literary scape-goat of my generation. Better neglect than such a life of torture. No, Peter, my mind is made up. I publish the novel and the poetry, as I have said; and if they fail, I leave England—forever."

He carried out his resolution as to the publication of these works, and in due course "The Parasite" made its appearance in three volumes. I considered it was a very clever novel, full of brilliant writing and keen observation of human nature; but the

critics thought otherwise, and a perfect storm of execration greeted the unfortunate book. Every epithet of abuse in the English language was used to describe the writing; the author was ridiculed most unmercifully for his attempts to elevate his style; he was told he was coarse and vulgar, that a superior housemaid could write a better novel, and was advised strongly to go back to the obscurity from whence he had emerged. Of course, such opinions had a terribly bad effect on the sale of the book, and in every way "The Parasite" was a dead failure, which result was received by the author with a cynical resignation.

"They won't have me as a novelist—that is very certain," he said bitterly, when at length he realized that his book was a complete failure; "perhaos I'll fare better as a poet."

I tried to dissuade him from publishing his poetry, knowing in my own heart that his proposed volume would be even a worse failure than the novel; but Lionel, who had a considerable spice of doggedness in his disposition, had made up his mind to carry out his scheme, so I desisted in despair from my well-meant efforts to spare him further humiliation.

Alas! my forebodings proved only too true, for that unhappy volume of poems met with even a worse fate than the novel. The papers took hardly any notice of it, and those that did confined themselves to the remark that "a volume of rubbish by Lionel Amberton had appeared, which was, if anything, worse than his shilling books." The book fell still-born from the press, and I doubt if more than half a dozen copies were sold, although the poems were

charming. Against stupidity, however, as Lionel had remarked, the gods themselves fight in vain; and simply because he had written shilling books, the critics refused to admit that he could write poetry.

Lionel, therefore, was a complete failure as a literary man, and, having recognized this fact, he put his plan of emigration into execution. Having sold his house in Hampstead, he paid his debts, realized all the money he was able, and one fine summer's day took passage with his wife to New Zealand. He gave up everything: his literary success, his chance of making money—which he could do easily by his shilling books—and sailed away to the colonies and oblivion.

That was the last I ever saw of him; but he occasionally wrote to me from New Zealand, where he had purchased a farm, and this is the last letter I received from him, which showed me how deeply the iron had entered into his soul. Of course I can only give extracts from the letter, as much of it refers to private affairs:

Extracts from the letter of Lionel Amberton.

"Yes, my dear Peter, I confess I am astonished at your letter. Knowing what I suffered as a literary man, I wonder you can advise me to take up the heavy burden I laid down so many years ago. Believe me, I am happier in my oblivion than I ever was during my period of—I cannot say fame, but notoriety. I have a small farm, on which I just manage to live comfortably with my wife and family. We are not rich—on the contrary, you would consider us very poor; but our life is a happy and contented one. Lillian is quite willing to live in this isolation as long as she has her children; and, what with attending to my farm and books and music, I manage to pass a very happy, if uneventful, existence.

Ah! my dear friend, when I think of the troubles I had in London, when my name was before the public as a writer, I feel profoundly thankful that I had the resolution to give up everything and sink into this peaceful oblivion. Very likely you will call me a coward for thus laying down my arms in the battle of life and retiring ignobly to the rear; but if happiness is the aim of existence, my timidity has certainly served me in good stead. I have perfect health, a charming wife, two dear children, and a sufficiency of this world's goods to keep me from starvation; so, with all these blessings, I am much happier than if I had remained in London to battle against a thousand unknown enemies. You know the saying: 'Happy is the nation which has no history.' 'Tis as true of the individual as of the nation; and I, whose life contains no events worth recording, am perfectly happy. Poetry I write occasionally; but only for my own pleasure and nothing from my pen has been printed for years. I read no new books, but am quite content with the old ones I possess, which I read and reread over and over again. I hear but little news of the world, nor do I want to hear it. My house is a veritable Castle of Indolence, wherein life passes away quietly; and any ambition I may have had is now dead and buried. The literary life, with its rivalries and hatreds, I regret not in the least: praise is no panacea for a sore heart, nor can laurel wreaths cure an aching head. My life is ignoble, you will say. So be it; but 'tis happy, and with such happiness I do not mourn for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which I once tasted and which turned out to be but Dead-Sea Fruit.

"Another thing I may say touching the literary life of the end of the century; and that is that the supply of novels exceeds the demand. Essays only appeal to a small class of thoughtful readers; poetry, like Shakespeare, spells bankruptcy: so the novel is the only means of making money, and is a very bad means. If a man have an independent income and can give time and study to his book, he will doubtless produce something good—that is, if he is capable, as I take it that with an incapable person writing is not a labor of

love, and, therefore, not tempting enough to linger over. But when a writer depends on his pen for his daily bread, the thousand vexations of money-worries prevent him doing himself justice ; therefore, for the sake of the world, I would



“NOR CAN LAUREL WREATHS CURE AN ACHING HEAD.”

say, let no one write unless he has an income sufficient to keep him from starving.

“Well, suppose a novelist produces something good. It may make a success, and every person will read the book and talk about it; but how many people will read it carefully and appreciate the careful writing which has taken so many months of anxious thought to produce? This generation lives

at too great a rate to read slowly; and they are quite as pleased with an inferior novel, provided it is clever, as with a really high-class work. Books now, with the great mass of people, are merely looked on as aids to pass the time, not to be studied, understood, and loved. I do not deny that there is a small class who look upon literature as a sacred thing, and welcome a really fine writer as the gift of God; but that small class is so very small that, unless the fine writer be independent, he cannot exist by his pen. Never was there such an age when the saying, 'survival of the fittest,' was so applicable. Every profession, trade, labor, is blocked with people striving to earn money, and the writer feels the stress of the time as well as every one else. Possibly, the 'survival of the fittest' proverb will also apply to the novel-writing profession, when posterity has winnowed the grains from the chaff; but at present it is nearly all chaff. Three-volume novels, circulating libraries, and compulsory education have ruined everything. Every one who can hold a pen thinks he or she can write a novel, and lo! another three-volume parcel of rubbish is thrown on the already glutted market. Why, my dear friend, should I assist in swelling the mountain of so-called literature, and only get thoroughly abused for doing so? No, Peter! my eyes are now open, and I even regret the works I have written. However, I stopped short in my career of sinful writing, and the world is neither the better nor the worse for my silence. There are plenty of writers left; and if they choose to work hard for a small stipend, given to them with much abuse from the papers, that is their affair, not mine. I am no scribbler, Peter! I am a farmer—a husbandman after the manner of Virgil; and if I let my talent lie in a napkin, it is simply because my neighbors have used their talents in such profusion, that my small effort to double my talent is useless work. Come out and see me, Peter, and lie beneath the spreading beech—or, rather, blue-gum: you won't find intellect and the learning of schools—but you will, at least, find peace and happiness."

CHAPTER XI.

THE EPISODE OF HAROUN AL RASCHID.

EUGENE always maintained that 'twas better to be born lucky than rich, and he illustrated this saying so very happily in his own life that I do not wonder he believed in its truth. It is not every one who is fortunate enough to stroll out one fine day and meet with Monsieur Chance, nor is it to every one that Monsieur Chance will give a helping hand—in which unkindly disposition this fictitious genius of circumstances only too closely resembles one's fellow-creatures. When Eugene therefore met, in the most unexpected manner, a kind of modern Haroun al Raschid, who enacted the rôle of Monsieur Chance in admirable style, and who, dragging Eugene from the Slough of Poverty, set him on the firm ground of a modern competence, I say that he was luckier than if he had been born rich. 'Tis by sharp contrasts that we gain pleasure, and had not Eugene been bitterly poor at one period of his life, he would certainly not have appreciated his moderate competence as much as he did. But to the narration of the episode, which is fanciful enough, yet perfectly true; which proves the justice of another saying, that "Truth is stranger than fiction."

Not that I like aphorisms. No! those detestable chips of wisdom, which are purposely made elastic so as to fit any situation, after the manner of the

Delphian Oracles, are most irritating, for they are generally quoted by one's friends as cold consolation after some unlucky occurrence which brings woe to its victim. Avaunt, ye arid bones of literature—phantoms of mediæval wisdom, which no one, however willing, can clothe with flesh and blood! I love ye not, in spite of the grain of truth contained in your dry husks; therefore, I advise ye, O my friends, not to annoy me with such comfortless sayings. Yet, as I began this chapter with the quotation of a proverb, I must, like history, repeat myself, and again remark, " 'Tis better to be born lucky than rich."

In the name of the Prophet, "Luck!"

Alack! Mahomet has but little to do with this episode; still, as I give the name of an "Arabian Nights' " hero to the secondary character herein, I must certainly try to preserve an Arabian Night-like flavor in keeping with such orientalisms like those romances of the Georgian period, which contained nothing Eastern in their composition, save a sprinkling of bizarre name. Therefore will I relate the "Episode of Haroun al Raschid and the Painter of London."

'Twas at ten o'clock in the morning that Eugene, with his dilapidated clothes thoroughly well brushed, his still more dilapidated boots made as presentable as possible, and his hat, which had seen much better days, carefully made new by the deft application of a damp towel, went out for his morning stroll in Hyde Park—that huge lung of London provided for the breathing of the populace by a paternal government. Most of the previous night had been em-

ployed by Eugene in touching up his great picture "Xantippe Scolding Socrates," in which Mrs. Prass had unconsciously sat for the great virago, and Socrates was the image of Halston in his pre-matrimonial days, when he was venerable in his ready-made suits of clothes. Our artist thought he would get this vast canvas into the academy, and we all certainly thought he had every chance of success, but as Haroun al Raschid said—nay, what he said should come in the middle and not at the beginning of the story; therefore will I not repeat his saying, but continue my tale from the introductory sentence of this paragraph anent Eugene's pedestrianism.

I know nothing more calculated to cheer the spirits of the despondent than a bright spring morning in Hyde Park. The sun shines, the trees wave their delicate green branches in the air, and the concourse of people awakening with Nature from their winter lethargy all present a scene which must have a good effect even on the most pessimistic. Eugene, I regret to say, was very pessimistic on this special morning, as the future presented to him anything but a cheerful picture; therefore, he sat himself down on a bench under a tree—reclining, like Virgil's bucolic, 'neath a spreading beech, and having lighted his pipe, conversed to himself in a low tone on the bitterness of fate, the badness of tobacco, and the heartlessness of the world.

"I am," said Eugene, contemplating his feet, shod in sufficiently bad boots—"I am now thirty years of age, and am still at the bottom of the wheel of Fortune. The jade who rules my destiny is either worn out or asleep, for never a twirl will she give of her



"A LITTLE GRAY OLD MAN."

SECRET
CONFIDENTIAL
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wheel to raise me from the mud. Year after year I have sent pictures, mostly classical, to the Academy, and year after year have they been rejected with a unanimity truly wonderful. Were it not for those pot-boiler pictures which go to mine uncle round the corner, I do not know how I should live. Am I a genius? I used to think so ten years ago; but now—alas! one cannot go against the opinion of one's fellow-creatures. 'Tis evident Bcademicians do not care for what is classical. Perhaps if I painted harmonies in yellow and blue, it would pay me better. Eccentricity is more sought after than good work, and if I could only strike out a sufficiently ridiculous line like Reginald and his physical drama, perhaps I would gain the eye of the public. At present, however, I have no ideas and no money—the one is as necessary as the other. Nothing remains but my bills and the Thames, both equally disagreeable. Death pays all debts, but then one never sees the receipted bills. On the whole, 'tis better to live. I can't be worse off than I am, and the longest lane has a turning. Egad! I wish I could got round the corner of this one; but then, perhaps the new prospect would be worse than the old. ' 'Tis better to bear the ills we have,' etc. Ah! my Bard of Avon, you knew the world. I wish I did; then perhaps I'd find out what bait would please it. At present, I regret to say, 'it's all up with Squeers,' and I have had no breakfast."

"For which sufficiently good reason you doubtless feel hungry?"

The interrogation came from a little gray old man, rather shabbily dressed, who sat at the other end of

the bench whereon Eugene was resting. He had a bright eye like a bird, and a quick, nervous, fidgety manner; evidently poor, judging from his dress; evidently a humorist, from the twinkle in his eye. Eugene turned round, and, after looking at him carefully, answered him at once in his own words, slightly altered:

"For which sufficiently good reason I feel desperately hungry."

"Come, and I will provide you with a meal."

"Mr. Samaritan, you are very good, but——"

"You think I am too poor," said the stranger humorously. "No, I am not poor. I dress shabbily because I like to. Only well-off men can afford to wear such a shocking bad hat as adorns my head."

"I was not going to say anything about your poverty," replied Eugene politely, "but merely remark that I don't know why you should take the trouble to act as *Deus ex machina* to a complete stranger."

"You please me."

"I feel flattered. Which part of me pleases you? My hat, my boots, my clothes, my conversation?"

"The last."

"Ho! ho! you have been overhearing Hamlet's soliloquy."

"Yes, 'tis much more original than the Shakespearian one, though hardly so philosophic. But we can talk of this later on. Meanwhile I am going to have breakfast at a restaurant nigh at hand. Will you join me?"

"*Timeo Danaos.*"

"Ah, bah! I can match your Latin remark with a proverb in English: 'Beggars can't be choosers.'"

"In some cases they can," observed Eugene, rising. "I choose to accept your invitation; and if the bill is long, owing to my appetite—well, 'tis your own fault for offering meals to hungry strangers in the Park."

"I think I can find sufficient money to pay the bill."

"O Rothschild, how I envy you!"

"My friend," said the Good Samaritan, with sudden seriousness, "you are more to be envied than I am, for you have youth and strength and hope, while I——"

"You have money, which is as good as the whole three put together."

"Ah! when you come to the age of sixty-five you will think differently."

"Very likely. Man is a changeable animal. I am a man—*ergo*, I am changeable. There you have logic."

"You are merry."

"'Tis the merriment of despair."

"Perhaps! Never mind; you will think differently after a good meal."

"Not unlikely! A child could play with a man after a good breakfast."

They entered the restaurant, which was in a quiet nook off Oxford Street, and the Good Samaritan—of whose name Eugene was entirely ignorant—ordered breakfast, to which they soon sat down.

"Eggs and bacon," quoth Eugene, eying the various dishes, knife and fork in hand. "Ah! this puts me in mind of my rustic youth and Coningsby, with his eggs like tufts of primroses. Fried sole! A most

delectable fish and quite a stranger to me, but I am happy to make its acquaintance again. Salmon cutlets! The salmon is the noblest of all animals—for breakfast. Tea! I'm well acquainted with the taste of tea. It may be bad for one's nerves, but 'tis excellent for one's stomach. Upon my word, Mr. Samaritan, you are an excellent hand at ordering a meal; but you do not eat."

"I do not feel hungry."

"Come with me, and you will enjoy that sensation thrice a day—in the morning, at noon, and at night. Hunger only reigns in Bohemia."

"And you live in Bohemia?"

"'Tis my adopted country."

"And you are a painter?"

"Of pictures, worse luck. Were I a painter of houses, I should fare better. I paint classical pictures, and have never been in Greece—wherein I resemble one John Keats, who indited poems *à la* Theocritus without having viewed Mount Hybla or tasted the honey of its bees."

"You are cynical."

"I am hungry! My good sir, a breakfast like this does not come the way of Eugene Delamere every day. Let me eat! My heart—I mean my mouth—is too full for utterance."

"So your name is Eugene Delamere?"

"So said my godfather, when I, a squalling infant, foresaw at the font the future misfortunes of my life. And yours?—"

"Ah! er! hum! Haroun al Raschid."

"You are Rothschild in disguise. I thought so!" Haroun al Raschid laughed.

"I may be more useful to you than Rothschild."

"Hum! hum! Pass the tea, please. May I ask, Mr. Haroun, why you take such an interest in me?"

"Your soliloquy attracted me. A man who spoke to himself as you did cannot be a fool."

"That is a mistake! I am one, else I had not taken up the trade of artist."

"I should like to see your pictures."

"I am afraid the sight of them would not repay your trouble. Still, you have given me a breakfast. Man should not be ungrateful. You *shall* see my pictures. By the way, you know something about art, Mr. Haroun?"

"A little."

"Humph! I thought Moslems were prohibited by the Koran from looking at pictures. What a bad place for artists Turkey must be—almost as bad as England! Well, sir, I shall be happy to show you my gallery."

"I shall be delighted to see it. Would you like a cigar?"

"Sir! I have not seen a cigar for years. With your permission, I will try one as a curiosity. Manilla tobacco does not grow in Bohemia, nor do we trade with the Philippine Islands."

Eugene was duly supplied with an excellent cigar, and then in company with Haroun al Raschid he sallied forth in the direction of his abode. Truth to tell, our artist was very much puzzled by his companion's behavior, but, like a true Bohemian, he asked no questions, being quite contented to take the goods sent by the gods without desiring to know the way in which such goods got within his clutches.

Haroun on his part seemed to be much amused with Eugene's cynical demeanor and conversation—so much so, indeed, that he let him do all the talking until they arrived in the garret of the aspirant to fame.

“‘Xantippe Scolding Socrates,’” said Eugene with great pride, placing his picture in the best light—“my best work.”

Haroun put up his eye-glasses and examined the picture closely.

“I hope not,” he said at length, shaking his head.

“You don't like it!” cried Eugene in dismay.

“Not a bit. It is stiff and badly drawn. The coloring is good otherwise;” here Haroun al Raschid shrugged his shoulders in a sufficiently eloquent manner.

Eugene felt considerably crushed. He had intended to overawe this stranger with an exhibition of his talent, and, lo! the stranger coolly told him that the picture—his great picture, intended for the Academy—was bad!

“I am sorry you don't like it, sir,” he said in a crestfallen tone. “I intend to send it to the Academy.”

“Don't!” replied Haroun decisively; “it will be rejected.”

“The deuce! You seem to know a good deal about art.”

“More than you think. Have you any other pictures?”

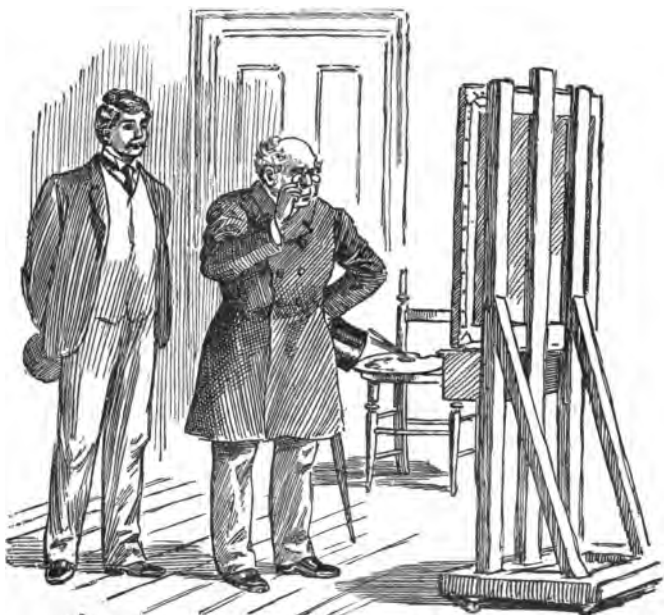
“A few, not worth showing.”

“Let me look at them. I hope you paint something else besides Plutarch's Lives and Homer's Iliad.”

"Well, I do landscapes sometimes. Mere pot-boilers. If I show them to you, you'll only call them names."

"Humph—perhaps! There are good and bad names, however. What's that?"

That was a moderately sized picture, representing



“HAROUN AL RASCHID EXAMINED IT LONG AND EARNESTLY.”

a wild expanse of marshy ground under a scarlet sunset. A gaunt tree, withered and bare, in the foreground, and pools of blood-red water, fringed with jet-black reeds, stretching away toward an angry sky. It was a wonderfully striking picture;

and having placed it in a good light, Haroun al Raschid examined it long and earnestly.

"Curious how a man does not know his own capabilities," he said at length, turning to the dejected artist. "Milton believed 'Paradise Regained' to be his best poem; and I've no doubt Shakespeare had a sneaking regard for 'All's Well That Ends Well,' in preference to 'As You Like It.' My dear young friend, you are not a figure-artist at all. You are a landscape painter."

"Like the Lord of Burleigh! So you think this marsh picture passable?"

"More than passable. Show me some more landscapes."

"I have a few reminiscences of my early days," said Eugene, bringing forward a pile of pictures. "Here you are. 'Castle Grim,' an Essex memory. 'Apple Blossoms,' that has something to do with Kent. 'A Devonshire Lane,' of that ilk. 'The River of Suicides,' a bit of Father Thames by moonlight. I don't think much of them myself, as they are all pot-boilers."

"Blind! blind!" said Haroun, looking closely at the pictures. "If you had sent one of these to the Academy, you might have had some chance of success. As to Socrates, burn it."

"It's my favorite picture!"

"That's lucky, because it is not likely to be any one else's. Well, I must go."

"And what do you advise me to do?" asked Eugene, somewhat disappointed at this abrupt departure; for he had thought, poor fool! that this eccentricity would buy some of his pictures.

"Do? Send that Marsh picture and 'The River of Suicides' to the Academy. Perhaps you'll have a chance of success."

"I'll take your advice. But about yourself. Shall I see you again?"

"Perhaps!"

"Won't you tell me your name?"

"I have told you: Haroun al Raschid."

The Eastern potentate, chuckling over his little joke, took his departure, leaving Eugene in deep thought before his landscapes. Our artist was a man who could not bear solitude, and was never satisfied unless he had some one into whose ears to pour his joys and woes; therefore he rushed up to my room and banged open the door, thereby nearly spoiling a beautiful "Ode to Riches" I was composing for rejection by some editor.

"Confound you, Mr. Whirlwind!" I cried, throwing my pen at him, "you've spoilt an idea!"

"Bother your idea! I've come to tell you some good news!"

"'And gold the cure of countless ills.' Ah! it's a beautiful line."

"Confound your line! Listen!"

Whereupon Eugene, who ought to have been a novelist, told me the tale of Haroun al Raschid in a highly dramatic fashion; then he made remarks on the episode; then he wondered how it would all end; and finally, after exhausting all his own ideas on the subject, asked me my humble opinion.

"I should send the pictures to the Academy," I replied sagely; "that old buffer is a dark horse."

"Do you think he is a patron?"

"Or an artist. I shouldn't wonder if he's an R. A."

"Well, I'll have a shot at it, but I've not much faith in the old man's advice. Good-by!"

"Where are you going?"

"To touch up those two pictures."

"And Socrates?"

"Confound Socrates! I'll send him to one of the comic papers."

I must say Eugene worked very hard at those two pictures. He was always a difficult man to please with regard to his own work, and now he was more particular than ever. He touched and retouched those pictures with the most wonderful industry, never losing a minute and hardly giving himself time to take a decent meal. At last they were finished, and two capital landscapes they were. I do not know much about art, and my opinion is therefore worth nothing; but I must say I agreed fully with that mysterious old man who told Eugene to stick to landscape painting. Both pictures were of the weird school, and the Essex Marsh landscape actually made me shiver, so uncanny the bleak pools looked under the fierce red sunset. As to "The River of Suicides" it was a vague, shadowy sort of thing, with London Bridge lying black and dense across the stream, and a strange light streaming in the distance from the Westminster clock-tower. All mist and mystery—I do not mean a pun—and was sufficiently horrible to act up thoroughly to its eerie title. Well, he finished those pictures, sent them in, and waited a reply. Day after day passed and no reply came; so Eugene was rapidly losing his spir-



"AARON THREW A SHOE AFTER HIM FOR GOOD LUCK, WHICH KNOCKED
OFF EUGENE'S TALL HAT."

its, thinking he would be unsuccessful as usual, when one day he rushed into my room with an open letter and danced a ballet expressive of joy.

The pictures were accepted—at least one was, and that one was “The River of Suicides,” which I liked the best. Nor was that the only letter he received, for there also came an epistle signed “Haroun al Raschid,” asking him to call at No. 42 Belmain Square that morning. Between the lot of us we managed to turn out Eugene in a sufficiently respectable manner, and sent him away with our blessing. Aaron threw a shoe after him for good luck, which knocked off Eugene’s tall hat, and caused him to use language which I will not repeat in these domestic pages. Beyond this episode everything went well, and we all assembled in my room to await the return of our dove to the ark.

He came back somewhere about five o’clock in the afternoon, positively incoherent with excitement, and we could get but little sense out of him. I constituted myself the mouthpiece of the assemblage, and tried hard to find out the events of the afternoon. Ultimately I succeeded, but it was hard work—almost as hard as interviewing a rising author.

“She is positively divine!” said Eugene in a tone of awe.

“She! Who?”

“Why, the girl with the golden hair.”

“Which girl with the golden hair? I know dozens!”

“Yes, but you don’t know her!”

“Oh, confound your mystery!” I cried angrily.
“Who is she? What is her name?”

"Violet! Violet—my Violet!"

"Violet what?"

"Not Violet What. Violet Gascoigne."

"Eh! eh! and her father?"

"Is Haroun al Raschid, born Robert Gascoigne, R. A."

"The deuce! So your visitor was that great artist?"

"Yes! He's on the Hanging Committee. That is why my picture was taken."

"And what did he say?"

"He said—'O Violet! Violet!'"

"I'm sure he didn't—no man is such a fool."

"She is so beautiful! Golden hair and——"

"Oh, shut him up!"

"And blue eyes," murmured Eugene from beneath the sofa-cushions.

"Do take care!" cried Aaron, in an agonized tone of voice. He's got my coat on, and you're all spoiling it."

Under these circumstances we let Eugene rise, and he stood in our midst raving about Violet, her hair, her eyes, her feet, her smile, until one by one all the Bohemians retired, and I was left alone with this gibbering idiot.

"Eugene," I said soothingly, "do be sensible and drop Violet. What did Haroun al Gascoigne say?"

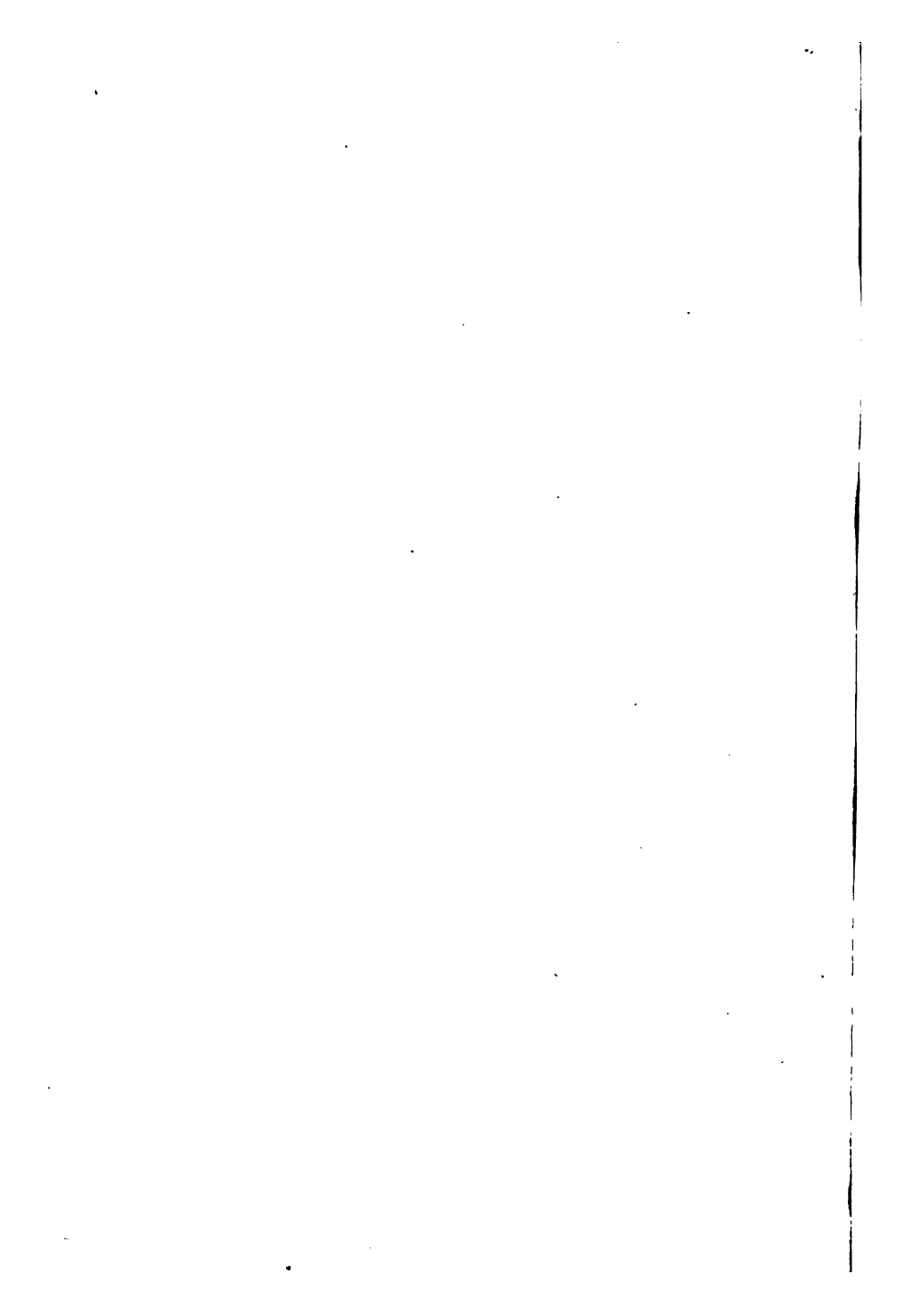
"Say? Oh, lots of things: I'm clever, and he is going to take me up. His daughter is so lovely! I saw her by chance. She's got blue eyes! The old man is coming to see you to-morrow."

"See me! About what?"

"About me, Peter. He wants to know all about



"VIOLET WAS HIS TEACHER."



me. I told him my history, and you must corroborate it. Do, like a dear fellow; for if you only saw Violet——”

“Oh, bosh! go to bed.”

I turned him out with the utmost sternness, and he stumbled down the stairs, murmuring, “Violet! O Violet!” until he made my head dizzy with the incessant repetition of the name.

Sure enough, next day Haroun al Gascoigne called on me to ask about Eugene’s character, and I felt like a mistress giving reference for a servant as I answered his questions. Of course I eulogized Eugene properly; and if my statements were to be believed, there never was, and never will be, such a good young man as this same artist. The old artist was wonderfully pleased, as he informed me he took a great interest in Eugene and saw great signs of talent in his work. He also added that he had no son, and would do his best to help Eugene on in the world; after which he took his leave.

If he had no son, he had a daughter, however, and for once the course of true love did run smooth, for that young lady chose to fall in love with our Eugene, who was madly in love with her, which resulted in an engagement. Eugene’s “River of Suicides” was well spoken of, and was sold for a very handsome sum, with which he took a studio for himself in St. John’s Wood, and left Bohemia forever. He also went frequently to see Mr. Gascoigne in order to get hints for painting; but so jubilant was he over these visits, that I strongly suspect he got hints for love, and that Violet was his teacher. At all events, Mr. Gascoigne was pleased to approve of

the engagement of his daughter to the young man whom he picked up so curiously in the park; and as Eugene was a real good fellow, I need hardly say I was very pleased with his good fortune. He left off the classical pictures and took to landscape, with the result that he soon was in receipt of a handsome income, upon which he proposed to marry Violet. As to that—well, one morning there appeared in the *Times* the following announcement:

“On the 20th inst., at St. John’s Church, Eugene, the only son of Henry Delamere, Esq., to Violet, only daughter of Robert Gascoigne, R. A. No cards.”

I know this is true, for I was best man at Eugene’s wedding.

CHAPTER XII.

"VOX POPULI."

"PETER," said Reginald, coming into my room one morning when I was at breakfast, "can you lend me that very fashionable coat you wore when Eugene was married?"

"By all means, if it will fit you."

"Well, I have certainly a better figure than you have. My shoulders are not of the champagne-bottle pattern. However, I must have the coat this morning."

"And the reason of this 'must'?"

"I am about to call on a few music publishers, with a dozen or so songs."

"And your 'Witch of Endor' overture?"

"No! Publishers will not look at that massive work, worthy of Berlioz in his worst days. The taste of the age lies, I am sorry to say, in the direction of frivolity; therefore I have prepared a few trifles light as air, which I propose to show to these men of iron."

"Are music publishers as disagreeable as book publishers?"

"Worse!"

"Pardon me," said I, calmly finishing my tea—one-three-farthings a pound, and precious bad at that—"it is impossible for a music publisher to be worse than a book publisher. Doubtless, one is as bad as

the other; but a book publisher, to my mind, represents the prose of the world."

"Ho! ho! because they won't accept what you are pleased to call your works."

"Precisely! I offer them masterpieces, and they refuse to look at them. Such will be your fate to-day."

"I hope not. I have such a variety of songs that one or the other must please some publisher. Like Nanki Poo, I can give them samples of the grave, the gay, the lively, and severe."

"Well, good-luck be with you! Here is the coat."

"Thank you. With such a garment I shall not be ashamed to beard the lions in their dens. But one good turn deserves another, so come and hear my songs."

"What! Do you call such martyrdom a reward?"

"I am afraid you are not musical, Peter," replied Reginald severely, as he escorted me downstairs, whither I went like a lamb being led to the slaughter; "but you must be educated. I will begin with the English ballad as it is made, and lead you gradually from Solomon to Sullivan, from Sullivan to Verdi, from Verdi to Gounod, from Gounod to Wagner, until you are merged in a whirling vortex of diminished sevenths and consecutive fifths."

"Spare me—the prospect is too horrible!"

"Sit down, you uneducated Caliban and smoke this pipe. I'll sing these songs of Araby, and don't criticise things you know nothing about, or you'll drive me out of my mind."

"At that rate I won't have far to drive you," I re-

torted grimly, and settled myself comfortably, pipe in mouth, in order to hear this ballad-concert.

Reginald in the most merciless fashion—authors and composers are always merciless when they secure a listener—produced a neat pile of manuscripts and placed them in front of him on the piano.

“I really do not know what to give you first,” he said, running his fingers lightly over the keys; “there are so many treasures in this heap of staves, bars, and divine melodies.”

“You seem to have a good opinion of your own work.”

“Creative genius is always egotistical, Peter. If it were not so the world would crush all the creative faculty out of it. I am proud of my good work, but as for this rubbish”—placing his hand lightly on the music before him—“it gives you no idea of what I can do. ’Tis written to sell, and is therefore extremely bad. The fault of my fellow-creatures, Peter. I would give them excellent work if they would have it, but bosh they prefer and bosh they must have.”

“Humph! that depends upon the publishers.”

“My dear Peter, if I can only write badly enough, the publishers are bound to take my songs. These efforts of genius are simply dreadful, but I am afraid the publishers will think them too high-class.”

“Who wrote the words of your songs?”

“Aaron wrote some. I have a few verses of your own, and I stole others from magazines, but the words are hardly bad enough.”

“Rubbish! Bad poetry will not make good music.”

“I trust not. The public don’t want good music.”

They like something with a valse refrain they can hum. Give the world a ditty in three flats, with a valse refrain and an easy accompaniment, and you will have a success. It will be sung at all suburban parties, and be attempted by every amateur who

thinks he or she can sing—which their name is legion.”

“How delightfully cynical you are!” said I, with a yawn. “So much for the prologue. Please get to the play at once.”

“Get to the playing, you mean. Certainly! Here, for instance, is the common or garden ballad, with a valse refrain. ’Tis in three flats, and can be played by the merest child after a course of Czerny’s exercises. The name is a beautiful one and



“AND THROWING UP HIS EYES TO THE CEILING, BEGAN TO SING.”

means nothing—‘I Dare Not Fly Thee.’ Listen to the poetry, Peter. Eight lines with four rhymes and a valse refrain—‘Tum tum, tra la la la.’ O shade of Mozart!”

He played over a simple introduction, and throwing up his eyes to the ceiling, began to sing in an affected voice:

“Ah! if thine eyes are cruel,
 For thee I do not care,
 Yet thy love is a jewel
 Which I desire to wear.
 Banish all woe and sorrow,
 Fly the world's toil and fret;
 Though I must leave to-morrow,
 I dare not fly thee yet.

REFRAIN.

“Mine! mine! yes, thou art mine,
 For thy love do I pine;
 Tears and laughter follow after,
 But I am thine, thine, thine!”

“It sounds pretty,” I said, when this delectable ditty was brought to a close; “but the poetry is horrible.”

“So is the music. Yet it contains the elements of popularity. The tune is easy, the words are unintelligible; so I have great hopes that the publishers will take it. Here, now, is a good old sea song, much affected by the suburban baritone. The very title has a briny flavor—‘The Sailor Sad.’”

“The Sailor Lad?”

“No! ‘The Sailor Sad.’ Sailors are generally supposed to be lively, so I thought a dismal sailor would be a novelty. Listen, and mark the chorus. ’Tis all ‘yeo-ho,’ which means nothing but sounds well.

“Come, lads so brave, I’ll tip you a stave
 While stormy winds are blowing,
 For on the quay Nance waits for me,
 Ere I to sea am going.
 Her heart’s not mine—a man of the line
 She loves, as I’ve a notion;
 But I don’t care—the wind is fair,
 So let us sail the ocean.

REFRAIN.

“With a ho yeo-ho away we go!
 Before the sun goes down,
 I'll sail afar across the bar
 From Nance of Bristol town.”

“Shade of Dibden! what a ditty!”

“’Tis the modern, rollicking ‘you-be-hanged’
 fashion.”

“It’s confoundedly disconnected, Reginald.”

“Oh, that doesn’t matter! It’s got lots of briny
 flavor about it. Four flats and six-eight time. Why,
 the chorus alone ought to sell the song.”

“It’s to be hoped so,” I said doubtfully. “Haven’t
 you anything better?”

“Insatiable mortal, how hard you are to please!
 Here is a Holy Bill song.”

“A Holy what?”

“A Holy Bill song. You know! all about organs
 and angels and minster windows, with choristers
 singing litanies. Holy Bill is the name of the spe-
 cies. This one is called ‘The Pew-Opener,’ and the
 accompaniment sounds best on a harmonium. ’Twill
 be much in favor at Brixton on Sunday evenings:

“Bright through the minster windows tall
 The evening light is streaming;
 But who is that against the wall,
 Who idly is dreaming?
 She tends the pews, oh, lovely maid!
 To angel-forms a sister;
 Her heart is in the churchyard laid,
 With him who last year kissed her.
 The anthem by the choir is rolled,
 The minster clock strikes ten,
 Her soul has gone to the city of gold
 With the sound of that last ‘Amen.’”

"Bosh! who ever heard of a pretty pew-opener?"

"No one; that's the novelty of the song. Besides, they all die in the Holy Bill songs, and go to the city of pearl and gold with the last 'Amen.' I don't know why they do it, but they invariably do. But I won't inflict any more ballads on you, except an example of the hysterical school—all demi-semi-quavers and passion. This agony is in three verses, and is called 'Thine Eyes.' I will only give you one verse, as you might die if I gave you the whole song:

"Thine eyes are stars, are stars,
Their light my being mars
When on my soul they shine,
Divine! Divine!
Their light away, oh! take,
Or else my heart will break,
And I from fond desire
Dissolve! Dissolve in fire
Like wine! like wine!
For I love thee—my soul is aching!
I love thee—my heart is breaking!
Oh! kiss me twice—again—oh! thrice,
For I long for thee! with anguish shaking!"

"Lord! Lord! what gush!"

"Doesn't it work up beautifully? Every one will buy this song, and 'twill be the cause of endless marriages."

"But it means nothing."

"Of course it doesn't, but it carries you away."

"It will carry me out of this room. Good-by!"

"No! wait a bit; I've got another song."

"I don't care if you have fifty," I cried, pausing at the door; "I've had quite enough of the British

ballad. It is quite as unpleasant as the British pun. Go and see your publishers, and if they accept all that rubbish, I'll stand you a supper."

Reginald laughed, and proceeded to array himself in my wedding garment, while I, quite worn out with the intellectual treat I had been having, went back to my garret and lay down with an aching head. The music I did not know anything about, though it sounded well enough, but the poetry was too much for me; and I began to think England had lost the faculty of appreciation when such rubbish sold as verse.

"O Browning! O Tennyson! O Swinburne!" I mourned, in bitter anguish, "why don't you write words for songs, and defend Parnassus from such rhymesters as these? Never was the English language so badly treated, yet this doggerel sells—sells, and I can't get any publisher to take up my epic in ten books."

Ah me! that epic! how useless were the months of toil I expended thereon! It began, "O Muse!" and was as long as Bailey's "Festus," being composed of much the same ideas—made up of dream stuff, of heavenly hierarchies, and insolvable riddles. I thought a great deal of it in those days, and wondered why the publishers did not jump at the chance of securing another "Paradise Lost." Now, however, I no longer wonder at their hesitation—no London firm would care about publishing for the Sphinx; and on re-reading my epic I am afraid 'tis almost as puzzling as the enigmas of that beast. I have the manuscript by me yet, lying in a box under layers of dust, forgotten by the publishers who were

once worried by it—almost forgotten by me, who thought so highly of it in my salad days, when I was green of judgment. There let it lie; 'twas an excellent work, as it afforded a wonderful example of—industry.

But with regard to Reginald, of whom I was speaking when I went off at a tangent in the epic direction; that young man returned late in the afternoon with a very disheartened expression on his face, and, throwing himself down on the bed, began his tale of woe, which was as long as the *Ancient Mariner's*, but scarcely so interesting.

"I've been to eight publishers," he said dolefully; "eight publishers!—think of the torments I have endured!"

"Yet you still survive."

"Barely! Have you any beer?"

"Fortunately, yes. Here, take this glass of malt; I do not want you to faint on the bed."

"You don't know what I've suffered!" said Reginald, drinking his ale.

"No; but I can pretty well guess what the publishers suffered, if you gave them a sample of those ballads."

"I did! I played six songs to every one of them."

I shuddered on hearing this; the idea was too terrible; and, much as I hate publishers, still I think Reginald's victims were deserving of pity.

"I offered them a patriotic song," went on Reginald, in a dismal tone; "but they said they never published patriotic songs. Sea ditties, they remarked, were a drug in the market. Hysterical songs were out of date. Jesters' songs they did not care about.

In fact, they objected to every theme upon which music could be written; and now I am puzzled to say what they do publish."

"Do they know anything about music?"

"Well, they are not Mus. Doc.'s, still they have a few set ideas of their own on the subject. They also keep a horror called the reader, who is, if anything, worse than the publisher. He does not like originality, because he does not understand it—nor imitations, because they are not original. Lord only knows what he likes, except refusing songs!"

"Try a comic song," I suggested, cruelly.

"I did. I offered them one called 'The Lost Boot-jack,' and they said all kinds of rude things about it. I kept up my spirits pretty well, but at the eighth refusal I gave way, so here I am."

"Didn't the coat soften their stony hearts?"

"No! nothing less than a steam-hammer could do that."

"So your afternoon has been wasted?"

Reginald, lying on his back with his hands under his head, kicked his long legs in the air and burst out laughing.

"My poor fellow!" I cried in alarm, "you are quite hysterical."

"Bosh!" was the uncomplimentary rejoinder; "but I've had an adventure."

"What! have you picked up a stray sovereign?"

"No such luck! No! but I've been knight-errant to a distressed damsel. She was foolishly trying to rush across the street by Regent's Circus, and would have been knocked down by a 'bus, only I dashed after her and dragged her on to the pavement."

"You saved her life?"

"Well, not exactly; but I've no doubt I saved her a broken leg."

"Bravo, Sir Launcelot! Is she pretty?"

"No! but she's better than pretty—she's famous."

"Oh! Who is she?"

"Miss Juno Binkle, the ballad singer."

"Ballads and ballad singers seem to be your fate.

I've seen her, Reginald; she must weigh thirteen stone—what you would call a fine figure of a woman."

"Well, she certainly isn't slight," assented Reginald, with some hesitation; "but she's very jolly. Thanked me heartily, and paid me all sorts of compliments."

"Words! words! words!"

"Confound you, Peter! you surely don't expect her to reward me with money?"

"No; but she might reward you by singing your songs."



"THANKED ME HEARTILY."

Reginald sat up briskly at this last remark, and looked eagerly at me.

"The deuce! that's a fine idea. But you forget the songs are not published."

"Pooh! that does not matter. Let her sing them from the manuscript. If she makes them go with the public, the publishers will soon take them up."

"She has certainly got a big reputation."

"Rather, and a big voice. 'Tis like the bell of St. Paul's."

The musician mused a little time, struck by the magnitude of the idea, and a pleased smile passed over his expressive face as he caught up his hat in order to take his departure.

"Peter, you have put new life into me. That is certainly the finest idea in the world, and if anything comes of it I will reward you with orient pearls and gold, after the fashion of barbaric monarchs. At present I will go to my room and write a letter to Miss Binkle."

"Ah! Reginald!"

"Well?"

"Miss Binkle is, I have been informed, a spinster. You, my dear fellow, are a bachelor. Therefore——"

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Reginald, with a boyish blush, and retreated hastily from the apartment.

It was a fine idea, though I, the author of this fine idea, make the remark myself; but then I must blow my own trumpet, as my trumpeter is dead—died from overwork. At all events, Reginald, with a promptitude quite surprising in so dilatory a youth, acted upon my advice at once, and sent a note to Miss Binkle, respectfully requesting an interview, which

she was graciously pleased to grant without hesitation. To her house at Hyde Park Corner went Reginald, arrayed once more in my wedding garment, and this time he returned with a smiling face and the information that Miss Binkle was going to sing one of his songs at a coming concert in St. James' Hall.

"Which song has she chosen?" I asked doubtfully, not quite sure if any of the compositions I had heard would suit the public.

"Oh! a new one I wrote last week to Aaron's words."

"Ah, well! the words will be sensible."

"They are charming. Come down with me, and I will sing it to you."

I went down with alacrity this time, as I was anxious to see the manner of work it was on which Reginald staked his reputation. The chance of getting Miss Binkle to sing the song of an unknown composer was truly wonderful, and I was anxious that Reginald should do himself every credit. Reginald, without any delay, sat down at the piano, tossed back his head, and sang as follows:

"THE SONG OF THE RIVER.

I.

"What did the river say that day,
Up in the forest green?
That Love would never fly away
From hearts where he had been:
Those days were as a happy dream,
Our hearts were young and strong;
We wandered by the gentle stream
And heard its tender song.

REFRAIN. †

“Oh! Love comes once in every life,
 But ne'er returns again;
 For tears and sadness, woes and strife
 Destroy his golden reign.
 So when he visits from above,
 His folded wings adore,
 And in our heart keep love, dear love,
 For ever, evermore.

II.

“What did the river say that night,
 Down in the noisy town?
 That Love's swift wings were spread for flight,
 When changed your smile to frown.
 Oh! cruel was that night of fears,
 With memories of wrong;
 Mine eyes were full of bitter tears,
 As sang the stream its song.

REFRAIN.

“Oh! Love comes once, etc.”

“The music is charming, Reginald, but I cannot say I am impressed with Aaron's lyric. 'Tis poor stuff.”

Reginald shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh! it's good enough. The most fatal thing to success is originality. I asked Aaron especially to keep to the usual maudlin poetry of songs, and he has obeyed my instructions to the letter.”

“I see you don't intend to elevate the taste of the public.”

“I go in for nothing so perilous. Reformers are always the worst used people in the world. It is very hard that I have to write catch-penny tunes, after the style of poor Lionel's novels; but if this

gives me the groundwork of a reputation I shan't complain."

"Sandy foundations."

"Maybe; but in these times of competition one must be content with whatever foundation Fortune chooses to give him. Now depart, audience, as I'm going to copy out this song for my Miss Binkle."

"Your Miss Binkle!" I cried, rising and making for the door. "Lord, how rapidly these young men do progress!"

I had just time to place the door as a shield between a boot and my head, after which piece of dexterity I returned to my humble garret to await events. They soon developed themselves, for the concert came off in due course, and as Reginald had generously given me a ticket which Miss Binkle had generously given to him, we both attended it with great dignity, to hear "The Song of the River." It was a great success, as something in the tune caught the fancy of the audience; and Reginald, in ecstasy, heard a young lady hum the refrain as he left the hall.

"O Fame, Fame!" he murmured, and pinched my arm so severely that 'twas black and blue for a week.

Well, whether Miss Binkle was really in love with the song, of which I am doubtful, or in love with Reginald, of which I am certain, she did her best for the young composer, and sang his ditty everywhere. By some mysterious means the tune trickled out from the concert halls into the streets, and very shortly the valse refrain of "The Song of the River" became the bane of the composer's life. Go where

he would, he heard that infernal melody coming round the corner on the pursed-up lips of some musical errand-boy! At last, when Mrs. Prass took to singing it in a cracked voice, Reginald could hold out no longer, and wished to go and die; but luckily I dissuaded him from this extreme course. I pointed out to him that if he wanted to endure the pains of purgatory, he had better interview a publisher on the subject of his successful song; whereupon he took my advice and the manuscript and boldly marched into a music shop in Regent Street. When he returned—O joy!

“Well, was it purgatory?” I asked.

“My dear boy, it was heaven! You never saw such politeness in your life. I must certainly get a book of etiquette, so as to know how to conduct myself in publishers’ rooms. Ah! what a fine race of men! How noble! how keen in picking out really good work! how——”

“All this means that they have taken your song?”

“Rather! and I’ve got a thumping royalty.”

“Go away! go away, you vainglorious Mozart, or I’ll throw crockery at you!”

He went away chuckling, and very shortly went away from Bohemia altogether—still chuckling, as he well might, seeing that his song sold by the thousand and brought him in a nice little sum of money. It brought him something else, however; and you can easily guess that the something else was Miss Juno Binkle, who bestowed her thirteen stone, her fame, and her big voice on the handsome young composer whom she had been the means of bringing to the front. Reginald, I am sure, did not

love her, as she was by no means beautiful nor in her first youth; but the fair Juno had made up her mind to become Mrs. Reginald Franklin, and Mrs. Reginald Franklin she is now. They get on very well together, I believe, as custom is everything, and do not fight more than any other turtle-doves I know. Mrs. Reginald has a good income from invested moneys, earned by her during her artistic career. Reginald writes her songs, which she sings and he gets published; so between the two of them they do very well. I go to see Reginald occasionally, when I am hard up for a meal, and Mrs. Reginald having heard it was by my advice that the composer called on her, is always especially gracious to me. Her voice and her figure are both as big as ever, and with such a jolly, good-natured wife Reginald certainly ought to be happy. Whether he *is* happy is another question, for I saw him standing outside a publisher's the other day with a very gloomy expression of countenance.

"Well!" said I briskly, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing! I've just sold another song."

"Well, that ought to make you happy."

Reginald shrugged his shoulders and sighed deeply.

"I tell you what, young man!" I said, looking at him severely, "you are suffering from an attack of too much prosperity."

The real fact of the case is, that I believe good living has made him bilious.

CHAPTER XIII.

LITTLE HUNCHBACK.

THIS is a melancholy story; therefore, I pray thee, gentle reader, peruse it not if thou art due at a wedding, for assuredly, if thou dost, thy rollicking speech anent the bridesmaids will be as dreary as the last comic opera translated from the French. Doubtless on seeing the title of this chapter you will think the matter herein contained has something to do with the "Arabian Nights' Entertainment;" but in this you will be wrong, as it has naught to do with any entertainment save thine own. Come, then, with me, if thou art prone to melancholy, and after a meal of hot buttered muffins we will sit sadly on a tombstone—like ghouls—and I will tell thee the story of Little Hunchback and the Pantomime Girl.

No, I did not mean to address the reader in such direct fashion; rather did I intend to hint in a mysterious manner that if he is hilariously inclined he should not read these grievous paragraphs. But, alas! my pen ran away with my ideas, and the result is inscribed on this page. Now, however, my wilful goose-quill—I detest steel pens—has exhausted its fire; therefore, being worn out with its unauthorized galloping, it will now proceed at a sober pace, and indite elegies, in prose, of woful seeming. In truth, such dejection is needed at this time, for the tale of Little Hunchback is most distressing. Still,

I warned the reader, some pages back, that life in Bohemia was not invariably gay; and this is one of the saddest stories I know—all the more sad for being true. A man's genius, a woman's devotion! alas! these be strange strings upon which to play a melody, but play it I will; and you can shut your ears to its sadness, if you care not for such drearinesses. David Venders, thou art dead, and forgotten by the world, but not by me, poor genius, not by me! nor, indeed, by her who loved thee so well that she saw the beautiful soul in the ugly body and worshipped its fairness for its own sake. Kitty, thou wast a good woman. 'Tis such deeds as thine that adorn the fair pages of the Recording Angel's book, and, fallen as thou wert in many ways, this kindly action will raise thee high—high as the gates of Paradise.

David Venders always put me in mind of Lady Mary Montagu's comparison of Pope to an interrogation point—as "A little crooked thing that asked questions;" for he *was* crooked, poor creature, and he *did* ask questions—irritating questions, which made one long to slaughter him. He had beautiful brown eyes, like a dog, with just that pleading look in them as one sees in a well-whipped fox-terrier. Perhaps his soul, sick of its ill-built tenement, was trying to speak by that language of glances which is more powerful than the uttered word. Do you understand what I mean? I am talking to you, madam, my reader. If you have ever been loved you must certainly know the eloquence of a glance. What is the most passionate "I love thee" on the lips of a lover in comparison with the burning gaze of his eyes, which reveal his feelings twenty times more

speedily than his tongue, however ready to tell his desire? Such was the eloquence of those dog-like eyes of David, which said a thousand beautiful things to those who were versed in the science of optics.

All women are. 'Tis coquetry, I understand; but they certainly can read the language of the eyes in a marvellously fluent fashion, and therefore, in the kindness or desire of their hearts, frequently assist the tongue-tied lover, so that he may be encouraged to translate his eloquence from his eyes to his mouth. Kitty was a woman—a very charming little woman, trim as a daisy—and therefore understood such speech, from which knowledge she gained the information that this crooked little ape loved her. Oh, "Beauty and the Beast!" how often has that old fairy tale been repeated within living memories? Believe me, madam, there is a great deal of truth in these old fairy tales, particularly in that one now under discussion, on which, were I so disposed, I could preach a sermon. But I am not in the pulpit, and therefore will willingly spare you such an infliction, merely remarking that the story, as played out by David and Kitty, had a tragic ending—not the fault of poor Beauty, however; she was most kind, as you yourself can judge by finishing this story.

David was a sculptor, and had a real talent for modelling. Of course, like all the other denizens of Mrs. Prass' far from model boarding-house, he was extremely poor, and made his living by modelling little figures in clay, which he sold for wretchedly small sums to the man round the corner—mysterious man round the corner—who bought Eugene's pictures. I had never been to his garret, which was at

once his bedroom and workshop; for he was of an extremely reserved nature, and had hardly enough fascination about him to warrant our inundating him with visits. On occasions he joined our Bohemian revels, and made himself very conspicuous by drinking water in preference to beer. For the rest, he was extremely depressed; his clothes were patched, poor, worn, but neatly brushed; and he was an excellent listener, although on occasions he would be seized with a paroxysm for asking maddening questions, to which peculiarity I have before alluded. None of us took much notice of him, save in a pitying way. Great, therefore, was the excitement in our Prague when it became known that this ugly little sculptor was paying court to our Kitty. I myself laughed at the idea, for Kitty was a pretty girl, who played in burlesque, and could have had her pick of many a straight-backed fellow; but I did not laugh when, in a moment of confidence, the little crooked thing told me the real circumstances of the case. It was the love of Art, and not the love of Kitty, which made him enact the rôle of a sighing lover. Indeed, the courting and sighing was all on her side, while as for David—but that must be told later on.

The way I heard the truth of this apparently ridiculous courtship was mixed up with the borrowing of a candle. As a rule, David Venders, unlike the rest of us, never borrowed anything; but one dusky evening, while seated at my window watching the cats crawling over the tiles, I heard a timid knock at my door, which slowly opened to admit a queer little figure. O you poor little soul, four feet

nothing in height, with your hunchback and your large head, how you did excite my mirth when you entered! but I sighed when you retired.

"Can you lend me a candle?" he asked, pausing irresolutely in the middle of the room.

"By all means. Luckily I have a few left."

"I would not ask you," he said hurriedly, "only I have an idea—a grand idea—which I wish to place on paper, but I have no light."

"Take two candles."

"No, one will do. Thank you; you are very kind."

"Why do you never come and see me, Venders?"

"I—I am busy—yes, very busy; and I don't know if you would care about my company."

"Oh, yes, I would. Come, sit down, and smoke a pipe with me."

"Thank you," he said gratefully, taking a chair; "I will sit down, but I do not smoke. No, I am too poor for such a luxury."

"Ah, bah! we are all poor."

"I am the poorest of you all. I have nothing in the world save my art."

"And Kitty?"

He flushed red and seemed about to speak, then suddenly shut his mouth tight and sighed sadly.

"Will you have some beer?"

"No, thank you; I only drink water. You are very kind." He hesitated a moment, sighed again, and then began to talk rapidly. "No, no! It is no such thing as you think. I have nothing to do with love. I am beyond the pale of humanity. As to Kitty—ah, yes! you smile when I say the name; but you need not smile. I am not presumptuous enough

to ask such a pretty girl to love a deformed wretch like myself. It is Art, you understand; it is Art. She has consented to sit as a model. Yes, my statue of 'The Dancer.' Only Art; there is no love in the matter."

"How did you get Kitty to consent to be your model?"

"She pities me," he said, simply; and I felt the tears fill my eyes at the pathos of the remark.

"Have you a block of marble?" I asked, after a pause.

"Marble? no! I am poor—very poor. I am modelling my statue in clay. You have been kind to me, so I will let you see it; but not yet—not yet."

"When it is finished in clay, what do you intend to do with it?"

"I don't know," said the poor creature, helplessly. "No, I have no friends. If I could hew my 'Dancer' from marble, my fame would be assured. She is dancing, you know—like this." Here he poised himself lightly on one leg, and threw up his arms, looking sufficiently grotesque in doing so. "She is dancing before the king—nude, of course—a Greek slave-girl. There is a smile on her face—a cruel smile of power—for she knows how she treads the hearts of all under her tripping feet. Her hair is loose, and crowned with roses. Oh, she is beautiful, my 'Dancer'! You will see her, I promise you. She swims in voluptuous abandonment on her pedestal; but she is cruel—cruel as the grave."

Then this extraordinary creature began to swing and sway about the room like a dancing girl. I saw his misshapen form, his grotesque features appear

and reappear in the dim candle-light, and his long arms made black shadows—uncouth statues—waver on the wall. Suddenly he stopped short, and became



“BEGAN TO SWING AND SWAY ABOUT THE ROOM.”

once more his own reserved self, retreating to the door with a bow.

“I beg your pardon! I was carried away by my enthusiasm. Like misshapen Vulcan, I make Olympus shake with laughter. I will see you again. Thank you for the candle. Good-by!”

“But, Venders—”

He was gone before I could utter another word; and long did I sit smok-

ing by the window, thinking of the strange revelation I had heard. This grotesque creature, who kept himself so entirely to himself, was wonderfully clever; I could tell that by his vivid description of his statue. And to think that he could not put such a beautiful dream into marble! It was

sad—terribly sad—to think of this genius—and he seemed to me to have the flavor of a genius about him, although I had never seen his work—starving in a garret and unable to perpetuate his fame for lack of material. Think of an author without paper to write upon, and you can have some idea of poor Venders, unable to create his vision for lack of marble. True, it was being modelled in clay, but that was very different from the spotless white marble in which “The Dancer” should be represented, with her tripping feet, her lithe body, and her cruel smile.

And Kitty!

“If he does not love her,” I murmured to myself, as I sought my virtuous couch, “she must love him, else she would not sit for a model without payment; and he is too poor to pay her. There is love in this—on his part or on her part—but there is love.”

’Twas at the beginning of winter that he called on me thus; and, knowing what a bitterly hard time winter was to us all, I wondered how much harder it would be to the sculptor, who had naught in the world but his art and Kitty. I would have paid him a visit in his den, but the man was so reserved, so peculiar, that I hesitated about thrusting myself where possibly I should not be welcome. All through that long winter I marvelled how Little Hunchback kept body and soul together; for, though I occasionally met him, he never yet asked me to his room to view the statue he had described so eloquently on that night. Neither did he allude to his poverty nor frequent our poor revels as usual. If he talked to any one, ’twas to Mrs. Prass or Kitty; and withdrew himself still further into that isolation of soul which

cut him off from the world of men. 'Twas long after that I heard the story of that winter; and she told it to me—yes! standing sobbing by the grave from which she had tried so vainly to save him. She! Who? Madam, I am talking of Kitty.

But this Kitty!—this echo of a name!—this myth! Who is Kitty? Ah! you want to know about the Beauty, as well as the poor Beast. Well, I will tell you about her; and I am not quite sure if her story is not the more pathetic of the two.



"SHE WAS A LITTLE BURLESQUE ACTRESS."

She was a little burlesque actress—nothing higher than that—and earned her bread sufficiently hard by appearing nightly in a minor part at the Frivolity Theatre—that very theatre which had erstwhile numbered our dear Laura among its members. Of course you remember how I told you of Laura's entry into the Peri-age. She became rich and titled, not deserving in any way such good fortune. Kitty, who really did deserve such prosperity, never attained this height. Rather did she—no! poor Kitty, I will tell no tales which will enable the virtuous to cast stones at thee.

Alas! I am no Balzac, to coldly analyze the heart of a woman. I am too tender-natured to dissect

every nerve in a brutal fashion, for the sake of Art. The cries of anguish uttered by the victim affright me, and I am fain to desist from a task which requires more courage than I can summon to my aid. Could you expect me to take Kitty's heart in one hand and a pen in the other, in order to describe its quiverings, its agonies, its passionate desires, its bitter disappointments? As well hope I would kill a man as do this! What I know of Kitty's heart was told to me by herself; but I never dared to raise further the curtain which veiled it from the world. The glimpse I caught of it showed me agony; but my heart is too weak, too tender of conscience, to analyze such sacred anguish.

As David admitted to me in a burst of confidence, 'twas pity for his deformity, for his loneliness, that first drew her toward him. Ah me! Kitty was no Shakespearian actress, else might she have known that pity is akin to love—the one brings the other as surely as does day the night; and in this case her pity passed into affection, and from that lukewarm passion developed into ardent love.

Their first conversation was on the stairs, where they met at the third landing, he going down, she coming up—a type of their lives at that time. I say their first conversation, not their first meeting; for, indeed, Kitty knew the deformed little sculptor as well as she did the other inmates of the house. She talked to some, she smiled at others, she nodded to all; and this last form of recognition was the state of her acquaintanceship with Venders. Certainly she was sorry for him, in a careless fashion, as a crooked little man; but hitherto she had not taken

much notice of him beyond the friendly nod. This time, however, by some trick of Fate, a pale shaft of light streaming on his face through the window on the landing showed her the pathos of his eyes. I have said before how clever Kitty was—from long practice—at reading the expressions of eyes; and this time the glance of a man, caught unaware, revealed to her his soul. The revelation came on her like a thunderbolt, and she stopped abruptly to speak with him.

“Mr. Venders, are you ill?”

“Ill!” he repeated vaguely. “No thank you, I am not ill.”

“You look worried.”

“Well, I confess I am worried, but nothing you would understand—or care about.”

“Is—is it money?”

“No; I am poor, still I have sufficient to live on.”

“You are a sculptor, are you not?”

“Yes; but at present I only model my figures in clay and sell them to keep me going.”

“Is your worry connected with your art?”

He looked at her in a rather startled fashion, for her chance shot had hit the mark, and he was wondering how she had guessed his secret. Alas! he did not know that a glance from his eyes had enabled her to read his soul.

“Yes, it is connected with my art. How did you guess that?”

“Oh, I am a witch in some things! Well, what is the worry?”

“I have an idea for a great statue, and I cannot

carry out my idea for want of a model—a female model.”

“Cannot you obtain a model?”



fr.

“ON THE STAIRS, WHERE THEY MET ON THE THIRD LANDING.”

He dropped his eyes before her steady gaze, and flushed with shame.

“I cannot afford to pay for a model.”

"If you had one, you could make this statue you talk about?"

"Yes; and if I could get it in marble it would make my name. First, however, I must model it in clay. I have plenty of clay, but no marble, no model."

"I am sorry for your trouble, Mr. Venders. Good-by!"

She danced lightly up the stairs, without further remark; and he went on his way, slightly disappointed at the manner in which she had behaved. She at first had seemed to sympathize, but afterward—well, who was he, to expect a charming girl to trouble herself about his affairs? Poor crooked little creature, he had received so many kicks from the world that he never expected to be rewarded with halfpence, however deserving he might be. A week later he met her again on the stairs, and again she stopped.

"Well, have you found a model who will sit for nothing?"

"No."

"Do you expect to?"

"No."

"That is wrong. I have found you a model who will sit to you without payment, if you so desire."

"You are laughing at me?"

"Indeed I am not! Will you take the model I have discovered?"

"I would be foolish to refuse. Who is this model?"

"Myself!"

"You?"

He drew back a moment, and stared at her in

amazement. A handsome girl was Kitty, with a beautiful figure, to which she owed a great deal of her success on the burlesque stage. And her face was charming also; a little hard from constant battling with the world—the fight is severe at six-and-twenty—still it was charming.

“Well, will I do?”

“If you will be so kind,” he said, in a faltering voice; “but really I never, never expected such kindness. I—I——”

“That’s all right. Say no more about it, Mr. Venders. I will come and sit to you to-morrow.”

“But I can’t pay you.”

“I don’t want payment. If you make a name by your statue, you can give me a present. Now, there! don’t thank me! Everything is settled; so expect me to-morrow.”

Lightly as a butterfly she floated away, and he walked back thoughtfully to his room, where he sat down to think. It seemed to him incredible that this beautiful, worldly woman should do this kindness for him—for him, poor Little Hunchback, whom every one despised and slighted. The news seemed too good to be true, and yet it was true; for no woman would torture the heart of an unfortunate man like himself by promising a thing she did not intend to fulfil. Yes, it was true; and his heart swelled with joy as he thought of the beautiful being he intended to create out of that formless mass of clay lying in the corner of his cheerless room.

All through that cheerless winter he toiled at his statue of “The Dancer,” and Kitty sat regularly to him as a model. She told me afterward it was

wonderful to see how the thing grew under his skilful fingers—the graceful arms, the uplifted foot, the delicately poised head—all these emerged like magic from the rough clay. Sometimes they talked while he was working, but more often she sat silent, listening to his wild mutterings as he manipulated the wet clay. I have read somewhere that the brain of a genius boils, so to speak, at a much lower temperature than that of other people; and assuredly this was the case with David, for he was often quite carried away with rapture of the beautiful image which occupied his brain. Poor Kitty! he had no thought of thee, who with tired face poised thyself so delicately on the platform. No, thou wert but the scaffolding which aided the building of the vision of the brain. “The Dancer” was designed from thee; thou wast its earthly counterpart; but the sculptor added to the dull clay by some miracle of touch a beauty which never shone on thy face. He took the base metal of Nature, and, fusing it in the crucible of his genius, transmuted it into perfect gold. The statue was thee to the life, with all thy capricious daintiness, but there was that about it, added by the sculptor, which lifted it to a higher world—from the real to the ideal, from earthly dulness to the land of Faery.

During all this time Kitty, unknown to herself, had passed from pity to affection, from thence to love; and now she worshipped this ugly gnome, who could create beauty from chaos. But, alas! David, wrapped up in his devotion to Art, never saw the love which flushed her face, which irradiated her eyes. With all the imperious command of genius

which brooks no contradiction, he ordered her to stand this way, to lean that way, with no care for her sufferings from cramp, until the poor girl almost fainted from fatigue, and would implore a respite, which he would grant but grudgingly. As a rule, David was a kind little man, but Art transformed him into a demon; and he would work on furiously for hours, regarding neither his own sufferings nor those of his model, until exhausted nature would cry out at last, when the master would lie down to rest for a time, and the slave, worn out with posing in a rigid attitude, would retire to recruit her strength for the evening's work. Yes, she must have loved him dearly to have put up so patiently with his imperious demands, his utter disregard for her comfort, and his constant neglect.

Being thus devoted to the modelling of this statue, he abandoned the work which generally brought him in bread and butter, and used most of his slender stock of money for fires to warm the room when Kitty was sitting to him. His sufferings during that winter must have been truly frightful, as he had hardly enough to eat, and but for the gigantic sustaining power of hope he must have inevitably given way in the end. Mrs. Prass dunned him for his rent, but he could not pay her; but went on steadily starving and working, growing uglier every day with the privations he was undergoing.

Kitty saw all this, and determined to help him in an underhand way, so as not to wound his pride; therefore she paid his rent regularly to Mrs. Prass, and thus kept that good lady away, much to the wonderment of David, who could not understand the

sudden cessation of that deprecating knock. Then she got into the habit of bringing up her mid-day meal to David's garret, on the plea that she did not



"BRINGING UP HER MID-DAY MEAL."

care about eating alone, and always asked him to share it. At first he refused, but afterward accepted; so he had at least one good meal a day, which I verily believe kept him alive. When the meal was done, Kitty would produce a bottle of cheap claret, and sportively challenge him to drink her health, which he would do with smiles, and for the moment change from an Art-controlled demon to a rational being. Whether he saw through all these little schemes I do not know; but at all events he got into the habit of taking everything that was given him in the most docile manner; and in return for such hospitality would tell Kitty all the fine things he intended doing for

her when "The Dancer" was exhibited and his fame secured.

Poor girl! there was only one thing he could give her which she desired, and that was his heart. But, indeed, I doubt if he had any; or if he had, 'twas in the possession of that frigid Muse who presides over soulless marble images. Verily, she never told her love; and sat like Patience on a monument smiling,

not at Grief, but at this hard-hearted little vampire who was draining her life-blood in order to satisfy his insatiable demand for perfection. Often did her heart ache as she saw her timid signs and hints disregarded by this man, who had no eyes for aught but his Art, and suffered—suffered only as a woman can who hungers for a love she cannot obtain.

At last the end came, as she knew it would. The statue was finished, and smiled cruelly down on its creator.

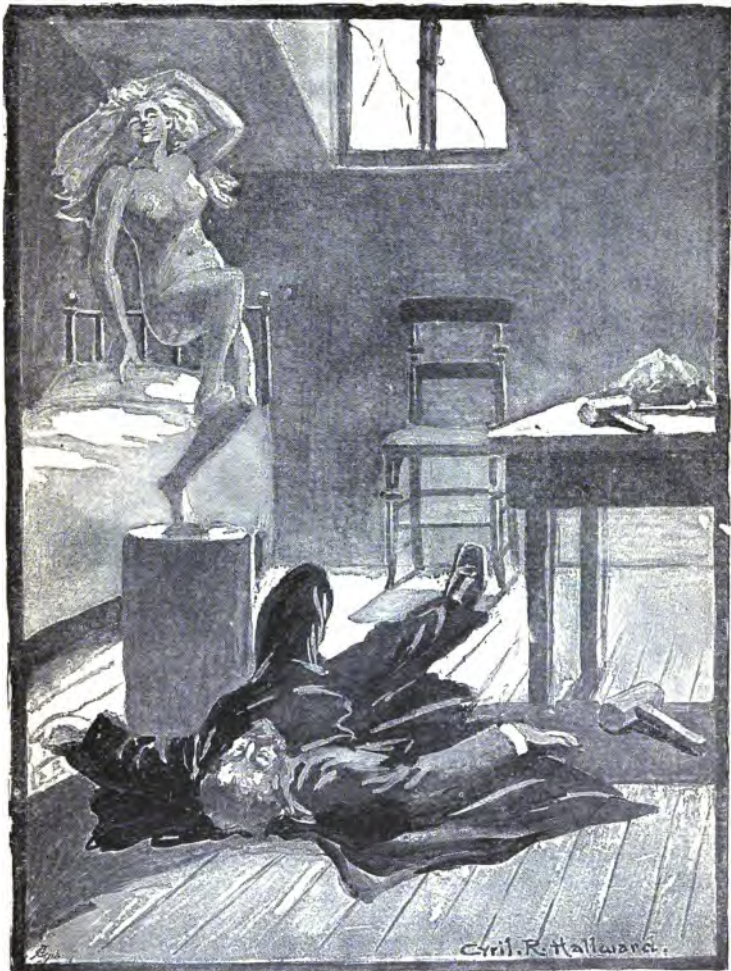
“It has everything but a soul!” he cried, in ecstasy, as he beheld his completed work; and would then look tigerishly at Kitty, as if he longed to take her soul, as he had already taken her body and her heart.

Kitty went off to another part of London to fulfil an engagement in a pantomime, but before she departed came to me by stealth and implored me to look after Little Hunchback. I promised willingly, and she went away with a light heart; so, in pursuance of my promise, I used to ask David down to breakfast and sometimes to supper. Sometimes he would come, other times stay away for days and refuse me admittance to his room. I think the statue drove him mad. He was fitful in his temper, raging one minute like a demon, and the next would laugh hysterically at nothing at all. Had I possessed money, I would have marched him off to Margate for a month, and there doubtless his mind would have recovered its normal condition; but I had no money, so could do absolutely nothing, except watch this poor genius becoming distraught under my very eyes for lack of food and comfort.

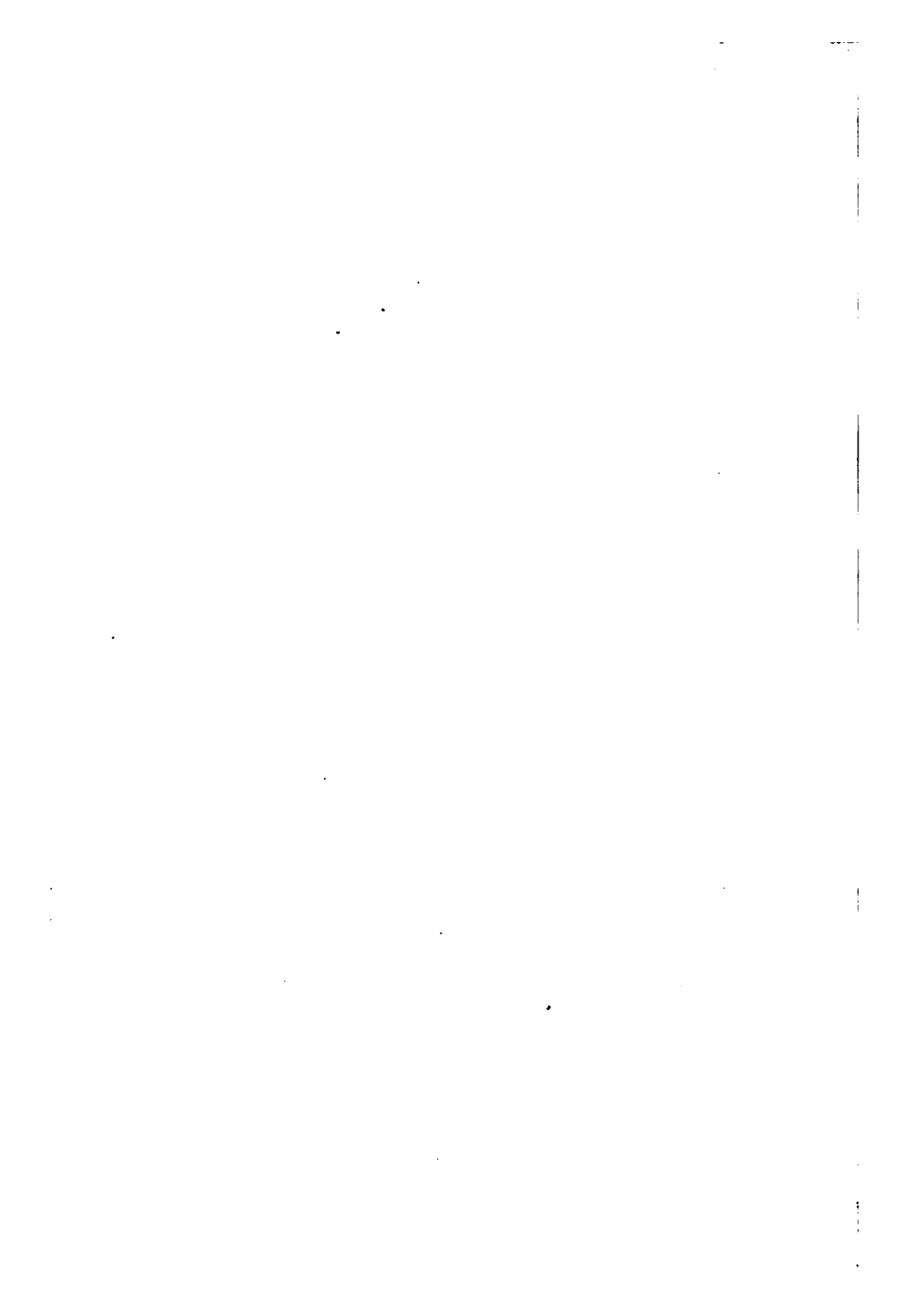
Every day Kitty wrote to me, asking how he was getting on; and every day I quieted her with false reports, for I could not bear that the poor girl should give up her engagement for the sake of a shadow. David wanted a block of marble for his statue, and I promised to see if Eugene—now on the way to wealth and fame—could help me. Not wishing to subject the sculptor to any disappointment, I said nothing about this to him; but one day went off to see Eugene to ask his advice and aid. David had been invisible for the last few days, but I trusted when I brought him the good news that he was to have his block of marble, that he would become more reasonable. It was the despair of genius that was destroying this man, and the only cure was to let him carry out his conception to the end, thus laying the ghost of his fancy.

Eugene, as I knew he would, readily agreed to do all that lay in his power, and walked back with me to Mrs. Prass', in order to see David and give his opinion on the statue. It was evening when we mounted the stairs, and on arriving at the door of the garret found it locked. I called to David, but there was no reply; so, with a vague dread in our hearts, we burst open the door.

The evening light streaming in through the one window showed us the delicately poised figure of "The Dancer," with her waving arms, her tripping feet, and enigmatic smile. But she did not smile at us. No, she looked down at the rose, the sceptre, the nightingale she was treading beneath her feet, and at the dead figure of David Venders, lying there with his hands clutching the rough wooden pedestal.



"THE DEAD FIGURE OF DAVID VENDERS LYING THERE."



I uttered a cry of alarm, which was echoed by another voice, and past us dashed the figure of Kitty, who flung herself wildly on the dead body of Little Hunchback.

"Oh, dear God!" she cried pitifully. "Oh, dear God! Starved! starved to death!"



"OH, DEAR GOD!" SHE CRIED PITIFULLY."

But what need to say more? The story is finished with that pitiful death in a garret. Whether he died of starvation or heart-disease, I do not know; but dead he was, and with his own money we buried him at Kensal Green. Yes, I said he was poor; but Eugene told Gascoigne, his father-in-law, the

pathetic story, and the old academician came and saw the statue. He thought it a wonderful work, and then and there purchased it. Little Hunchback left no relations behind him, so part of the money was used to pay his funeral expenses and the rest I handed over to Kitty. She came to the funeral with me, and stood sobbing beside the grave, on the clay of which a fine rain was falling. Indeed, I was not far from tears myself when she told me of her unrewarded devotion, her broken heart, her starved love.

But who am I, to chronicle such things? Alas! I have not the genius to set down that bitter tale of martyrdom in fitted words, so I will leave it in oblivion. Such burning tears, such aching anguish, such despairing cries—no! I can tell none of these things to you, who carelessly turn over these pages for amusement. They are sacred.

And the irony of Fate!—oh, the bitter irony of Fate! She was obliged to take part in the pantomime that night. Broken heart, ruined life, despairing soul, she acted in the pantomime! And if her face was in agony under the cap and bells—well, the audience had paid for laughter, not for tears!

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTAIN ULYSSES.

WHAT! do you think I am a medium, and can conjure up for your gratification the shade of that classical mariner whose life was as perilous as that of the hero of a modern melodrama? Alas! much as you desire it, I cannot perform impossibilities; and the ghosts of my raising appear only to myself, though I do strive—but not always successfully—to introduce them to the public through the medium of print. I cannot show you the astral form of that fickle Greek for whose departure Calypso was so inconsolable—*videlicet*, “Telemaque,” *de M. L’Abbé Fenélon*—but I can show you a modern specimen of the type. True, this nineteenth century Ulysses will not bear comparison with his Greek prototype for birth, or for greatness of soul, or for valor; but in the matter of craftiness I think he will be able to hold his own. You can take my word for it that this latter statement is true; for I, who tell you of this fox, have suffered bitterly through his cunning. But there! I was always a guileless infant; and repeated experiences of the swindling capacities of my fellow-creatures do not seem to destroy my belief in human nature. Nevertheless, how I came to be taken in so completely by Captain Prass passes my comprehension. Why—oh! why does the green show so plainly in my eye? I notice I have dropped

into poetry, like Silas Wegg. Why is it that my fellow-man takes advantage of my ill-concealed innocence to make me a scapegoat for his own sins? I cannot tell; but this I can tell, and will tell, that Simon Prass, the errant spouse of Sophia Prass, would have taken in many a wiser man than I. Take me in? Why he took us all in! and our cultured brains were very little use when pitted against the uncultured cunning of that vile sea-serpent Prass.

I never knew Mrs. Prass had a husband until I saw him in the flesh, as I always thought she was real turtle, not mock—by which allusion I am not referring to soups, but to the fact that I believed she was a genuine widow. Alas! the life of Mrs. Prass was a hollow sham. Widow she was certainly, but only a grass-widow; and when Simon Ulysses came home to Sophia Penelope, I own that the blow was a severe one. My faith had been shaken in Sophia Prass by her scratching notices of eviction on the wall, which turned the signor's party into a Belshazzar's feast; but it gave way altogether when I discovered she was a living fraud. True, she had dropped hints about a wandering husband, but what are hints to plain speaking? And if she was a grass-widow, why did she not say so? There is no harm in being a grass-widow so far as I know, and 'tis cheaper than being the genuine article, as it does not entail the expense of burial or mourning; yet I distinctly affirm that the cap of Mrs. Prass bore such a family likeness to "weeds" that she took us all in as to her widowhood, almost as much in as did her wretched husband when he played low on our innocent natures.

For the discovery of the baseness of our Sophia I was quite unprepared, and my astonishment was profound when, on descending to the kitchen in search of a culinary utensil I desired to borrow, I found Mrs. Prass weeping copiously by the window and a rough-looking mariner seated by the fire. I also heard sniffs from the back-kitchen, which led me to believe that the slavey-sycophant was weeping in order to keep her mistress company. The wooden man by the fire—and he was very wooden—seemed in nowise disturbed by this duet of sorrow, but simply kept on staring at the grate and murmuring, "Don't take on so, Sophia!"

But Sophia would take on, and continued sobbing bitterly, until my unexpected entry dried her eyes and opened her mouth, from whence speech speedily flowed as copiously as had the pearly drops from her eyes a minute before.

"Look at 'im, sir!" she said, in a shrill complaining tone; "look at 'im, sittin' there like a wooden Dagon at my fireside! But I s'pose, Simon, you will call it your fireside? No, Simon Prass; no! There is law in the land; an' if I 'ave to sell the roof over my head, I'll have a divorce!"

"Don't take on so, Sophia!"

"For ten year—ten year!—I've never set eyes on you, Simon, since you ran away with the silver spoons and the money in the tea-caddy; an' now you comes smerkin' and smilin' to your outraged wife, an' arskin' of her to support you!"

"There's no place like 'ome," observed the wooden Dagon, complacently. "Don't take on so, Sophia!"

"What is the matter, Mrs. Prass?" I asked, won-

dering at this scene. Whereupon Mrs. Prass sniffed viciously, tossed her head, and pointed to the stranger.

"E's the matter, sir; an' I don't wish for wuss—my 'usband!"

"What! are you married?"

Mrs. Prass looked at me with a surprise which I consider was perfectly brazen, seeing the way in which she had deceived us all.

"In course I am, sir; I never said I wasn't."

"No, Mrs. Prass," I replied, reproachfully; "but, on the other hand, you never said you were. I thought you were a widow."

"Grass-widder!" sobbed Sophia tearfully. "If 'e was a man 'e'd make me a real one."

This cool proposition to the mariner to commit suicide did not startle him in the least, but it caused him to rise, like a marionette—he was very wooden—and make a few observations.

"Don't take on so, Sophia! I 'aven't come 'ome poor."

A wintry smile illumed the wan face of Mrs. Prass.

"Ho! so you 'ave money?"

"No, not money; but I've that which ken be turned to money."

"Jewellery?"

"No."

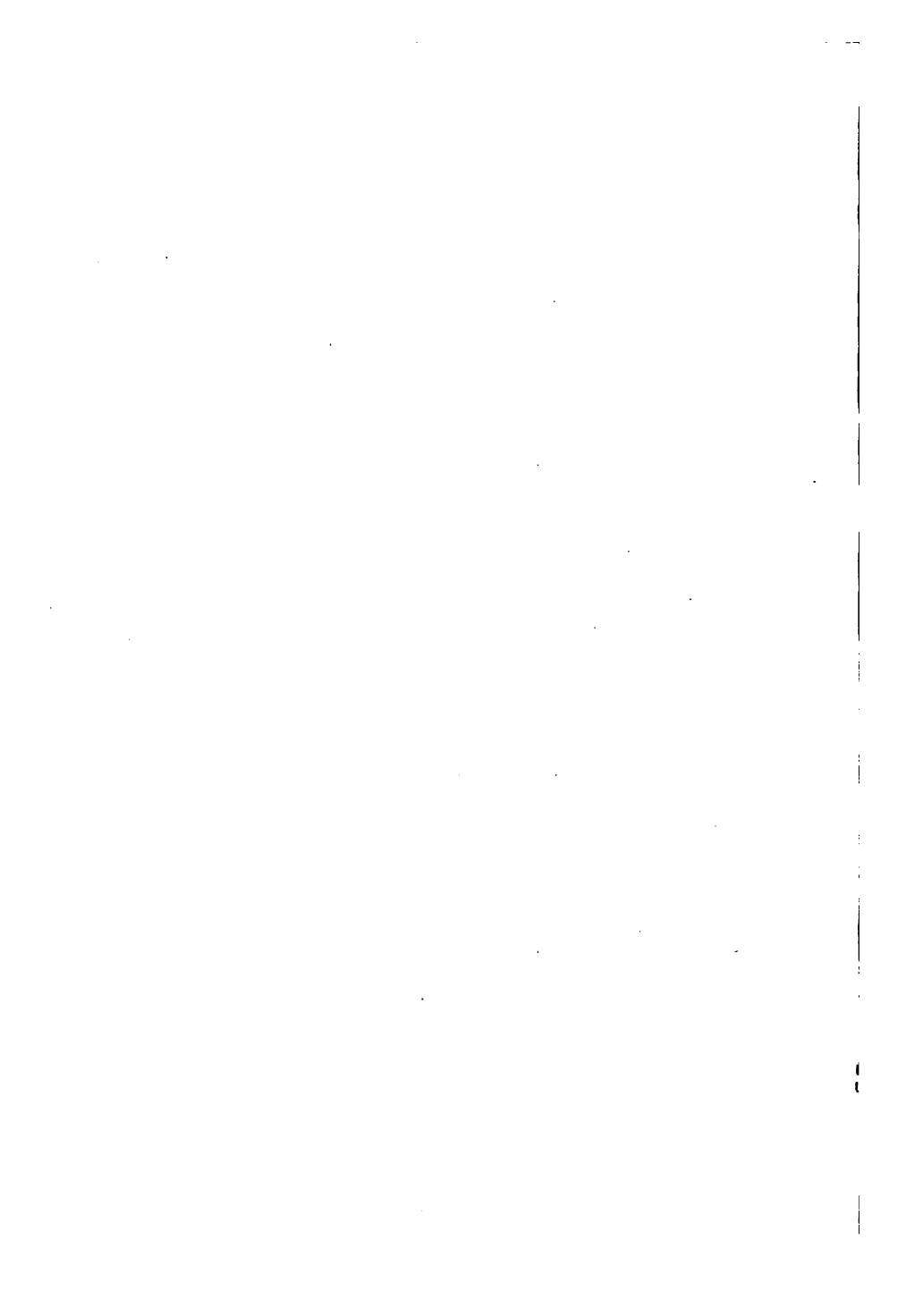
"Plate?"

"No."

"Then what is it, Simon?" burst out Mrs. Prass, her curiosity getting the better of her temper. "Don't keep me on the tenter-'ooks of hagony."



"'E's THE MATTER, SIR; AN' I DON'T WISH FOR WUSS."



"I'll tell you agin, but it's summit to do with a littery gent."

"A literary gentleman," I replied curiously.

"Yes. If I might make so bold, sir, do you know of any littery gent as wants a job?"

"Well, I'm a literary gent, and I would like one myself," said I, judging it wise to take advantage of every opportunity given to me by Fortune.

Captain Prass eyed me anxiously for a few minutes, then said in a hoarse whisper:

"It's got money in it, sir! If I might make so bold, I'll come up an' see you this evenin'."

"By all means. Your wife will show you my room."

"It's got money in it," reiterated Captain Ulysses, squeezing his glazed hat further down over his ears. "Money! lots!"

"Lor, Simon! what is it?" asked Sophia, who was bursting with curiosity.

"Never you mind, Sophia," said her husband significantly; "you ain't glad to see your Simon!"

"Oh, ain't I? 'Ere, Julianne, git the capt'in somethin' to eat. An' what was you pleased to want, sir?"

This was a hint to me to retire, so that Mrs. Prass could pump the wary captain at her pleasure. Therefore I meekly asked for my saucepan, obtained it, and retired. The last thing I heard as I left the kitchen was the sound of a kiss bestowed on her husband by the grass-widow, which piece of affection he seemed to relish less than the tears, judging from the repetition of his usual remark:

"Don't take on so, Sophia!"

I returned to my room with a certain anxiety to consult some one on the matter; but, alas! all my comrades of former times were scattered far and wide, like the graves of an household; and somehow I had not made chums of any of the new-comers, who supplied the places of my old friends. Therefore was I reduced to thinking over the matter myself, and came to the conclusion that it was impossible for a rough sailor like Captain Prass to be of any service to me. What he wanted to see me about I had not the least idea, as literature and this ignorant sea-dog were as far asunder as are the poles. Still, he distinctly said he wanted the assistance of a "littery gent"; and as I pretended to that rank, I thought it best to find out what he wanted, and agree or disagree as I thought fit. Perhaps he wanted me to draw up a citation for divorce in the matter of Prass *v.* Prass and the Lord knows who; but in that case he would have seen a lawyer. No; it was something more than that, and I confess I was curious to know what was the proposal he had to make to me which had money in it.

At six o'clock, just as I was finishing my tea, he came up with a large parcel under his arm; and having accepted a drop of Irish (cold), he sat down, breathed stertorously, and began to reel out lies by the yard.

"Lord, sir!" he said to me, as he cut up some tobacco—nasty black tobacco—which he produced from his pocket; "you don't know the adventures I've 'ad. Why, they'd make a book as long as my arm! I've bin in Chiner an' Indier an' Amerikey an' hevery other place in the world. There ain't a

trick I ain't up to, an' I kin talk any langwidge you likes to put a name to, as well as Henglish."

If this was the case, I felt sorry for his linguistic acquirements; but I did not—as in the first place it would have been rude, and in the second undiplomatic. I therefore grunted an assent to the forego-



"AND HAVING ACCEPTED A DROP OF IRISH (COLD)."

ing speech, whereupon the captain—who had been anxiously eyeing me to see if I swallowed his lies—was much encouraged, and started off again on the war-path.

"Now there's Afrikey," said this fluent liar; "why, nobody knows so much of that 'ere place as me!"

I feebly suggested Bruce, Livingston, Stanley, and a few other great explorers, but he received these respectable names with scorn.

"Oh, I dessay they knows a lot about it, they does, an' write books; but if I wrote a book," he said with emphasis—"if I wrote a book, it 'ud reveal things as 'ud make 'em sit up!"

I had no doubt of this in my own mind; but decided that such book would follow the school of authors created by the late Baron Munchausen.

"There was Jimmy Bilston," he said reflectively, filling his pipe. "Lord! the 'orrid adventures me an' Jimmy 'as come through! We've bin starvin' for weeks in jungles, we 'ave; we've bin almost dewoured by wild beasts, we 'ave; an' as to cannibal niggers an' their hidols—well, Jimmy knows about that, Jimmy does."

"Does he? and where is Jimmy now?"

"Ah, sir! you may well ax that! 'E's in one of the two h's for sure. They ate him raw."

"Who ate him raw?"

"The Tongwong tribe, as lives on the coast of Noo Guinea."

"Cannibals!" said I in horror, upon which the captain nodded and chuckled.

"Thousands of 'em! They boils strangers in 'ot pots."

Query: Had this mariner been perusing Rider Haggard's "She"?

"An' the money they 'ave! Tons of silver buried in the earth, like pirates!"

No, he must have been reading "Treasure Island," by Stevenson.

"But, sir, I don't want to tell no lies, I don't," he said, which remark at once confirmed my opinion as to the truth of his statements; for when a man asserts he does not want to tell lies, he invariably utters them by the bushel.

"No!" resumed Captain Ulysses—I called him that name in my own mind, because he was such a liar—"I don't want to tell nothin' but the truth, an' the truth is 'ere."

"'Ere" was the parcel, which he banged down noisily on the table. Having done this, he unfastened the strings which bound the brown paper and produced therefrom a bulky manuscript.

"What I want t' see yer about, sir, is this 'ere—the manoocript of my travels through the Tongwong country, with noomerous 'air-breadth hiscapes an' perils, by Simon Prass, mariner."

"You didn't write this yourself?" I said, casting my eye rapidly over the MS., which was beautifully written, and consisted of notes, memoranda, etc., which could only have been set down by an educated man.

"Me! lor no!" replied Captain Prass, reverting to the favorite exclamation of his wife Sophia. "It were Mister Gillon."

"And who is Mr. Gillon?"

"'Oo was 'e, you mean, sir?"

"What! cannibals again?"

"They ate him roasted."

"Horrible!" I said, quite undecided as to whether he was lying or not; for the manuscript was genuine enough. "Well, who was Mr. Gillon?"

"When I met 'im, sir, 'e were at Zanzibar, 'ard

hup; but 'e were a great scholar. Lord, yes, sir! bin eddicated at H'oxford; but 'e were hawful 'ard hup there. Well, I 'ad made a bit of money when I seen 'im, and 'ad 'eard of a lot of hivory which was to be got at in the Tongwong country; so ses I to 'im, ses I, 'You come with me, sir, on this 'ere hexpediting, an' I'll purwide the dollars.' "

"Why did you want him to come with you?"

"Well, sir, he were 'ard hup fur one thing," said the captain generously; "an' fur another, I wanted a scholar to take notes of the hexpediting, as I didn't see why I shouldn't 'ave a book like Mister Stanley. So 'e, being 'ard hup, came along with lots of paper to take notes, an' we started for the Tongwong country. We were there, sir, fur two year, an' I cum back alone of all as started."

"Were all the others killed?"

"Dead as door-nails, sir! Poising harrows, typhus fevers, cannibal eatin's—that's what took 'em; but as for me, after a course of 'airbreath hiscapes, I got to the coast with that there book."

"And now you want to publish it?"

"I do, sir; but I wants assistance. You see, sir, Mr. Gillon 'e ain't got no relatshings, as I knows hof; an' as I purwided money fur the hexpediting, an' didn't get no hivory, I thinks myself hentitled to what I kin get hout of that 'ere."

"Certainly; that seems reasonable enough."

"But all that there, sir, is notes, and they requires arrangin', which I can't do; so if you does it fur me, and gets the book published, why, sir, I'll give you 'alf of the money."

"That is a very generous offer, Captain Prass;

but I cannot accept it until I have read these notes."

"Why, they're all right, ain't they, sir?" said the captain anxiously.

"They seem to be so; but your kind offer takes my breath away. However, if you leave me that manuscript until to-morrow, I will look over it, and see if I am capable of editing it as you wish."

"An' w'en kin I come ag'in, sir?"

"Oh, to-morrow evening!"

This being settled, the captain withdrew, and I devoted the rest of the night to reading over the notes on the Tongwong expedition made by the late Mr. Gillon. He must have been a wonderfully clever man; for the notes were most carefully made, and the pile before me contained information of the Tongwong region, of several unknown tribes, remarks about the flora and fauna of the country, descriptions of savage ceremonies, villages, war tactics, and all things necessary for a complete understanding of the mysterious continent of Africa—at least, of that part inhabited by the Tongwong tribe. I saw that I could easily arrange these notes in the form of a book, as they were so clearly made; but first—with unusual caution—determined to take the MS. to Eugene, and ask his opinion regarding the story of Captain Prass.

Since his accession to money and matrimony, Eugene had become very cautious. There was none of the former reckless oh-it-will-be-all-right-in-the-end style about him, to which he was so much addicted in his Bohemian days. He now listens quietly to all that is said, and then delivers his opin-

ion in a cold-blooded manner, like a hardened Q. C.; consequently, when I told my little tale and displayed my large manuscript, he hummed and hawed for quite ten minutes before he gave judgment. When he did so the judgment was in favor of Captain Ulysses—with certain reservations.

"The story is credible enough," he said judicially. "This vagabond captain of yours seems to be a wanderer on the face of the earth. 'Tis not unlikely he has been in Zanzibar, and doubtless went on an expedition to the Tongwong country with this Mr. Gillon. At all events he was honest enough in telling you he did not write this manuscript, as it seems to me to be the work of a singularly clever man—aye, and of an Oxford man. I could tell that by the writing; for 'tis quite the style of that small, delicate writing affected by the youths of that university. On the whole, I think you can take the matter up, and edit the book. I don't fancy you will find much difficulty in getting it accepted, as African travels are all the rage just now; and it will give you a start in literature. But, by the way, you will have a formidable rival."

"Who? what?" I demanded anxiously; for, in truth, I was ignorant of daily events in those days, having no great love for the newspapers, nor indeed, as a rule, the requisite penny with which to buy them.

"Why, don't you know George Spencer, the great African explorer, is lying ill at Cairo?"

"Never heard of George What's-his-name."

"Really, Peter, your ignorance is disgraceful. Surely you can afford a penny every day for a paper?"

"Clearly, Mr. Eugene Delamere, you have forgotten the meaning of the word Bohemian. I have no daily penny. If I had I would spend it on physical, not on intellectual, food."

"Well, well! George Spencer has been exploring Africa for the last three years, and, curiously enough, has been through the Tongwong country, like Prass. Two months ago he emerged from the swamps with ivory, gold-dust, a book, and a fever, which latter has kept him ill at Cairo. When he gets well he is coming to England, to be the lion of the season and publish his book."

"The deuce! About the Tongwong country?"

"Precisely! However, as the Americans say, 'you have the inside running'; so if you hurry up and get Prass' book out, you may rake in the dollars first, and leave the rest to Mr. Spencer and his book."

"Egad! there's no time to be lost. I'll get to work at once. Who publishes Spencer's book?"

"Oh, Randell & Co. are his publishers!"

"Are they? Then I'll go at once and see Bilster & Son, who hate Randell & Co. like poison. If I show them the manuscript they'll jump at it."

"Mind you get good terms!"

"Trust me! I haven't starved six years in Bohemia for nothing."

"Ha! ha! that's exactly what you have done."

"Eugene, spare me your opulent jokes. You are too rich, my friend. A dose or so of garrets and scant meals would do you good; so come and see me to-night, and I'll introduce you to Captain Prass."

"Right you are! Expect me at eight. I dine at six-thirty."

"Shade of Chatterton, hear him! He dines and I don't."

"Well, come and have dinner with me?"

"No, thank you! I have a sufficiency for a meal."

"Pride, pride!"

"Rubbish, rubbish! I'm off to see Bilster & Son."



"I SAW THE HEAD OF THE
FIRM . . . AN OLD FOSSIL."



"AND AFTERWARD THE SON
. . . YOUNG FOSSIL."

That afternoon I did a good stroke of business; for Bilster & Son, willing to combine money-making and revenge, were very willing to listen to me, in order to anticipate Randell & Co. in their African book idea. I saw the head of the firm—who, by the way, was an old fossil—and afterward

the son—who was a young fossil—and ultimately made an appointment with them next day to introduce Simon Prass, mariner, to their notice.

Captain Ulysses, who was awaiting my decision with much anxiety, was duly presented by me to Eugene and to the publishers, all of whom put him through a severe examination, from which he emerged triumphant. Bilster & Son agreed to take the book and pay a good sum down on account of royalties when the manuscript was delivered; so I rubbed my hands with glee, foreseeing prosperous days in store. Alas! alack! and well-a-day! Fortune only whirled me up to the top of her wheel in order to whirl me down to the bottom again, which was a cruel thing for the jade to do to a deserving young man in my position.

All things being settled, I went to work on Gillon's notes, and soon succeeded in reducing them to order; while Captain Prass went to work on various drinks—rum generally—and soon reduced his intellect to disorder. Indeed, I wonder how his wife put up with him; but having learned the amount to be paid for the book by Bilster & Son, she not only put up with this Caliban, but actually supplied him with money to buy what he vulgarly called "booze." Everything seemed to promise well, and I hoped soon to show my father—who had never believed in my brains—what a genius I was, when the thunderbolt came. I was under the thunderbolt, but the wary Prass cleared.

I was just about the middle of the book, which I called "Midnight Africa," when a note came from Bilster & Son, asking me to send them some of

Gillon's notes, as they wanted to see them particularly. Being too busy to go, I sent some sheets by Captain Ulysses, who delivered them to the publishers, and then returned to me with a somewhat pale face. I asked him what was the matter, but he muttered something about ill-health and went away. Heavens! if I had only known! But I did not know until the next day, when I received a letter from Bilster & Son, requesting me to call on them at once. I did so; and then—oh then!—what a time I had of it, all through that villain Prass, whom I would gladly have handed over to the inquisition if that useful institution had been in working order in our midst.

Bilster was there, Son was there; to my amazement, Randell, the rival publisher, was there; and a lawyer was also present. This latter gentleman, who had a perfect genius for torturing, set to work and tortured me—poor, innocent me—by describing the villany of Simon Prass, mariner.

The reptile—forgive me if I grow warm, but there are limits to human endurance—the reptile, which means I am speaking of Prass, had never been in the Tongwong country at all; he had never been in any wilder place than Cairo, where he was employed at an hotel in some menial capacity. The viper was no genuine mariner; his seamanship was a fraud, like his wife's widowhood; and although he had been frequently to sea, 'twas in the capacity of cook. At the hotel where this snake-in-the-grass was employed resided Mr. George Spencer, the African explorer, who was down with fever; and all European Cairo was talking of his wonderful exploits and the

money he would make out of his coming book. Inflamed with envy, and inspired by the fiend, the serpent Prass gained admittance to his room, and, stealing his notes of the Tongwong country, bolted to England with his booty. It was Spencer's notes I was writing my book on, and Gillon was a myth.



"BILSTER, AIDED BY SON, BEGAN."

Lord! I have often heard of people's hair standing on end, but I never experienced it myself until I was told that pretty story. The fraud had been discovered at the printing-office by some compositor, who recognized Spencer's handwriting. Randell & Co., hearing of Bilster & Son's projected book of Afri-

can travels, called on them, and, after telling them of the loss of Spencer's notes, asked to see the manuscript they—I allude to my publishers—were going to bring out. Bilster & Son sent to me for a sample of the manuscript, and the writing was recognized by the compositor, as stated above.

When the lawyer ended, Bilster, aided by Son, began, and I had a bad time of it. They called me all the names they could think of, and they both had good memories. Luckily, however, I had Eugene to substantiate my statements regarding my innocence in the affair, so I brought him to the office of Bilster & Son, where I proved my ignorance of Prass' vile plot and made the publishers retract every word they said, under threat of an action for libel. Then I took the Spencer notes which I had in my possession and delivered them at once to Randell & Co., who, I am glad to say, entirely exonerated me from any blame.

Having thus looked after myself, I went, in company with Eugene, to look after the evil-minded Prass; but that wary mariner had made himself scarce. When he took the manuscript I sent him with to the office of Bilster & Son, one of the clerks had mentioned incidentally that there was something wrong in connection with the book, and that Mr. Spencer had come to England; so the guilty Prass knew it was all up with him. I suppose it was dread of prison made him bolt, or, perhaps, dread of his wife; but in my private opinion it was a dread of the horsewhipping he would have got from me which made him depart. Prass was strong, but given to drink; I was wiry, and temper-

ate in the extreme; so I knew perfectly well I could have made a Prass jelly of him, and I am very sorry I had not the opportunity of doing so.

When I inquired for Captain Ulysses, his wife, who was quite ignorant of his delinquencies, said he had gone out for a walk; whereupon I told her about the whole affair. Sophia nearly went out of her mind. She called Prass naughty names, wept, raved, howled, raged, and finally went into hysterics on the kitchen floor, in company with Julianne, the slavey. I left them both kicking vigorously on the floor, without offering to assist them; for Captain Ulysses had destroyed my belief in human nature, and I felt fitter for murder than for kindness. Eugene, good old fellow, consoled me as well as he could, but I was terribly cast down at my misfortune; and I consider Fate was most unkind in not permitting me the small gratification of thrashing Captain Ulysses thoroughly. Where he went to I do not know. Very likely he is swindling some one else on the other side of the world; but if ever I meet him I will—but this is not Fox's "Book of Martyrs," so I describe no tortures.

Spencer's book on Africa duly came out, and was a great success; but I did not read it—I could not read it—as it reminded me too forcibly of the Prass fraud. Randell & Co. made a lot of money out of it; but I firmly believe Bilster & Son blame me because they did not publish the book first and secure the cash which went into their rival's coffers. If ever I do want to bring out a collected edition of my works—when I write them—I certainly will not go to Bilster & Son; it might be dangerous!

CHAPTER XV.

LOST ILLUSIONS.

HAVE you read that wonderful book of one M. de Balzac, called "Illusions Perdues"? I am talking to you, sir, for indeed, madam, 'tis not a novel you should read, unless you have been hardened by a course of comedies at the Palais Royal. If you have not read it, life in its fulness has never been revealed to you, not even through your own experience; and if you have read it, there is no need for me to make further explanation of my meaning. I borrowed the book from Eugene, who had a most immoral book-case, and read it with great interest—the more so as I found many points of resemblance between myself and Lucien de Rubempré. Not that I was ever so weak-natured nor so handsome as that unfortunate hero; but I, too, have had my illusions; I, too, have lost them—in a less painful manner, 'tis true, nevertheless in a fashion bitter enough to cause me much pain and regret. O golden time of youth, how I lament your departure! Like Faust, I cry, "Stay! thou art so fair!" but envious Time leads me onward to gray hairs and bitter sorrows, destroying a belief of adolescence at every step of the journey. I, too, have been in Arcadia! I, too, have been in Bohemia! I, too, have been in Philistia!—and of the three, I prefer the first. 'Tis a fool's paradise of where-ignorance-is-bliss for sure, still it is a para-

dise; and as we cannot hope to get the genuine article on this earth, we must thankfully put up with a good imitation.

I must say I was growing very weary of Prague. One cannot live six-starving years of ill-success in a garret without feeling that one has made a mistake in one's vocation. I thought, at twenty, that I was a genius; but at twenty-six I had my doubts on the subject. Probably if I had been a wealthy dabbler in literature I should have died in the firm belief that Shakespeare was inferior in brain to myself; but by applying the test-stone of poverty to my imaginary talents I soon learned to rate my capabilities at their true value. Going by that test the value was absolutely *nil*, for my brains were not clever enough to set the Thames on fire nor strong enough to stand the wear and tear of hack-writing. Wisdom said, "Return, thou prodigal son, to thy father, and confess thyself a failure!" while Pride, giving exactly the opposite advice, remarked, "Make one final attempt with all your strength, and you will succeed." Acting the part of the demigod in this Choice of Hercules, I took the advice of Pride, because it was most palatable to me, and made up my mind for one final effort to convince the world that I was clever. After that the Deluge.

In truth my literary powers were of the light and airy order; for I had not paid enough attention to my studies when at school to make me a perfect prose-writer, nor had I undergone the cruel grinding apprenticeship to knowledge demanded of those who would succeed in that ironically-named Republic of Letters. What this age demands from its writers is

perfection of workmanship, and it will pardon commonplace thoughts, if delicately expressed. Tell the world great truths in bad grammar and you will fail as a writer. Alack! my case was even worse. I had no great truths to tell, and my grammar was by no means perfect; so I speedily came to the conclusion, after six years of bitter experience, that I was not one of the chosen lights of the age. Still, my poetry was better than my prose, and, in deference to the advice of *Pride*, I made up my mind to test the appreciation of my fellow-creatures by means of a volume of verse.

Certainly I did not think to make money out of such a publication. Shilling shockers pay, but poetry does not; and if our eyes were keen enough, I have no doubt we would see *Erato* shivering in rags at the keen blasts blowing round *Parnassus*. No! poetry does not pay; so, with my usual wisdom, I determined to tempt *Fate* with poetry. What with one thing and another, I managed to eke out a bare existence—a magazine article here, a set of verses for some advertisement there. 'Twas all grist to the mill, and if I starved, at least I did so independently.

I took a long time over that precious volume, and wrote and re-wrote my rhymes until I thought they were perfectly flawless; but the critics did not think so when they massacred the innocents. The book, which was the orthodox slim volume of first attempts, was called, "*Hoops and Patches*," which had a Georgian ring about it; but the introductory ballade smacked more of the Bourbon than the Hanoverian court. I reproduce the ballade in question for your

delectation, and you can either disdain it like the critics, or admire it like myself.

A BALLADE OF HOOPS AND PATCHES.

I.

That time was merry as the Spring,
 For life was like a gay romance,
 And courtiers all adored the king
 When at Versailles he led the dance.
 Then Colin fired by roguish glance
 A sudden kiss from Chloe snatches—
 Ah! those were happy days for France,
 In that blithe time of hoops and patches.

II.

They thought they lived in Arcadee,
 And would their giddy life forsake ;
 To play at rustics gay and free,
 Or with their strains the echoes wake.
 Alas! that Time should ever make
 An end to all such merry catches ;
 For each one was a witty rake,
 In that blithe time of hoops and patches.

III.

But lo! the Revolution came,
 And Chloe's cheeks grew pale and thin ;
 While gilded lord and haughty dame
 Awoke from their sweet life of sin,
 To hear the Marseilles' fierce din,
 Dismayed behind their prison latches ;
 And saw the death of all their kin,
 In that blithe time of hoops and patches.

Envoi.

Ah, Prince! those ladies now are dust,
 Gone all their sports and giddy matches ;
 They danced on a volcano's crust—
 In that blithe time of hoops and patches.

I will ask no one's opinion on this ballade, as he might hold a different one to mine regarding its merits, in which case I should probably get very angry. Therefore, I will make no further remark about my poems beyond this: that I duly finished that volume of immortal verse, and having purchased a pair of strong new boots, in view of the work before me, started to walk round London with the object of interviewing publishers.

The pedestrian exercise I took benefited me in no other way than to keep me in good health and give me a large appetite, which I had no means of satisfying—at least, to its fullest extent. I certainly made the acquaintance of every publisher in London; but that gave me little pleasure, as they did not receive either myself or my poems with the enthusiasm I expected. It has always been a pleasant reflection to me that I took it out of every firm largely in stamps, for the manuscript of the poems was bulky, and I only called to leave it—never to take it away. How could I, when I thought it would remain permanently at the last place I left it? My poems returned to me as persistently as did the dove to Noah; but alas! no olive-branch—*i. e.* notice of acceptance—did they bring with them; and when they arrived by post from the last publisher left to bring them out in London, I could have put them in the fire, out of sheer rage at their non-success, but that I was too tender-hearted toward the offspring of my brain to make an *auto-da-fe* of their precious pen-and-ink existences.

Then Richard Halston asked me to dinner, and I went.

Very likely you will think this abrupt announcement has nothing to do with the preceding paragraph or with the poems; but on my faith it has, for at that dinner I met a successful novelist, who—nay! this is putting the cart before the horse, so I must first relate how I found myself at Halston's hospitable board.

Of course you remember that fraud of a philosopher who married Lavina and got the better of a critic, which was the only clever thing he ever did in his life, save becoming the husband of a rich woman, which was also clever. I told the story in Chapter V., under the title of "These Be thy Gods, O Israel," and though I asserted therein that Halston was a fraud—an opinion I still hold to—yet he was a kind-hearted fraud; and I knew the dinner to which he invited me would be a good one.

Mr. and Mrs. Halston, having an excellent income, lived in excellent style, and much affected the society of those literary men, artists, composers, and musical folk who form the society of Upper Bohemia. Therefore I ought to have gone to the dinner in evening dress. Unluckily, my uncle round the corner was taking charge of my festive garments, and I had no money wherewith to redeem them. Therefore, if I went to the dinner, I would have to go in my poor but neat suit—black serge, the only one I possessed—which was the badge of my poverty and utter defiance of all social rules. I did not know whom I should meet at Halston's house; but so anxious was I to have a really good meal—seven courses, with wine—that if the Prince of Wales had been present I should have gone as I was. And I did go

as I was, much to the indignation of the footman who opened the door; for I saw that he regarded me with a wrathful eye. It so happened that I was the first guest to arrive; therefore I was able to explain

to Halston the reason of my non-compliance with fashionable requirements. Halston, the fraud, was an excellent fellow in the main, and knew what Bohemia was; so he good-naturedly accepted my excuses, as also did Mrs. Lavina, who thought—Heaven pardon her!—that I was a genius, and had a right to be eccentric.



“REGARDED ME WITH A WRATHFUL EYE.”

There were present an idiot from the F. O., a girl who had been presented at Court and mentioned the fact every other minute, an elderly lady who was mixed up with some mission about reforming the dress of women and would have been wise had she commenced operations on her own; and a successful novelist. I liked the successful novelist, who was a fat, jolly sort of man, with a hearty laugh and a general air of being able to bully his publishers; but the rest of the company eyed my serge suit as though it were a fig-leaf only—in fact, I believe they thought it less decent. Halston took in the elderly lady, the

successful novelist Mrs. Halston, the F. O. escorted the St. James girl, and I took in myself, as I was looked upon as a kind of poor relation, and therefore not entitled to much consideration, or a whole lady all to myself.

The dinner was good, the wine was excellent, but the conversation was vile in the extreme. The suc-



“THE F. O. ESCORTED THE ST. JAMES’ GIRL.”

cessful novelist seemed to have left his brains at home and brought his appetite only, as he ate a great deal and said very little. What he did say was not worth thinking about. I always thought

great literary people dropped pearls and diamonds of wit out of their mouths, as they did in the days of Holland House; but they certainly do not do so now, so I suppose in this used-up age they keep all their ideas for their books. Genius must be economical when 'tis so hard to make a living, and one cannot go on wasting sparkling remarks which would bring so much a page if printed. At all events, the successful novelist held his literary tongue, and the rest of the company manufactured bricks without straw—*i. e.*, they made conversation without ideas. The F. O. talked society to the St. James girl, the mission woman explained her mission, which was as puzzling as the description of a bridal trousseau, and Halston, in company with Lavina, babbled generally about nothing at all. I held my peace and made a good meal, and when we all went to the drawing-room we were thoroughly tired of one another. Luckily the guests took their leave speedily, as the F. O. had an engagement at the theatre, the court girl was going to Lady Something-or-another's "At Home," and the mission woman wanted to go home to write an article for the *Taylor's Magazine*.

All this lot disappeared until there only remained the host, hostess, the successful novelist, and myself; and out of this reduced number Mrs. Halston speedily disappeared, as she wanted to go to bed and get her beauty-sleep—which she needed sadly. I do not wish to be malicious; but she was not pretty, in fact, she was—but no! "It is better to be good than beautiful"—most consoling proverb to ugly people—and Mrs. Halston had a kind heart and a large income. When she finally vanished to be taken to

bits by her maid, Halston proposed we should go to the smoking-room, which we did, and all three established ourselves in big arm-chairs, with cigars, and whiskeys diluted with soda—but not too much so.

Now came in the sweet o' the night, and we all three made merry in a wondrously unexpected fashion. Halston reverted to the talk and ideas of his Bohemian days, forgetting for the moment that he was wealthy; the successful novelist unsealed the fountains of his fancy; and I, playing the part of a good listener—a most important rôle—sat smoking my pipe between them, hearkening to their conversation. The novelist, expanding under the genial influence of tobacco and whiskey, related to me his early struggles, which were almost—but not quite—as bitter as my own; then, seeing, I suppose from the fire of my eye, that I was a brother of the pen, began to cross-examine me as to my status in the world of literature.

“Do you write novels?” he asked, with an encouraging smile.

“No! I have not yet had the audacity to tackle a three-volume. My talents confine themselves to the manufacture of mild stories for cheap magazines.”

“Ah! we must all begin like that.”

“*Sic ad astra itur*,” spouted Halston, who retained his bad habit of misquoting Latin.

“My dear Halston, you can only get to them by a golden ladder such as you discovered.”

“Eh? go thou and do likewise.”

“Certainly! produce your heiress.”

“You do not seem very hopeful,” observed the successful novelist, curiously.

"No; I am beginning to doubt myself."

"That is a mistake. Talent never succeeds unless it is egotistical."

"You are quite right, sir; but even the stoutest egotist gives way before six years of failure."

"Six years?"

"Yes; I have dwelt in Bohemia all those years, and I am where I was—at the bottom of the ladder."

"What are you doing now?"

"Trying to get a volume of poems published."

"A mistake! Verse does not pay."

"It seems to me nothing pays—but a good business. In my next transmigration I hope to be born a draper or an hotel-keeper."

"My dear sir, an hotel-keeper is the reverse of a poet. He is made, not born."

"*Poeta nascitur*," began Halston; but I directed such a fierce look at him that he failed to finish the quotation and sought courage in his glass of whiskey. Henceforth the conversation was all between the successful novelist and myself, as Halston, daunted by my cross face—I was in a terribly bad temper, perhaps the result of too good a meal—kept discreetly silent. The novelist was now all on the alert, evidently regarding me as a unique character, capable of being turned into copy, and as 'twas the hour of midnight, when a man reveals his inmost soul to a pleasant companion, he began to analyze me in the Socratic manner—by questions.

"What made you go in for literature?" he asked, with an expectant look on his face.

"Conceit; I thought I was a genius."

"Oh! and you don't think so now?"

"I am certain I'm not."

"My good sir, give up literature! With such a poor opinion of yourself, you will certainly never succeed in a profession in which self-confidence is the most necessary quality to possess."

"You possess it, I presume?"

"Largely! I think myself wonderfully clever; but I don't present my cleverest side to the world."

"Why not?"

"Because I find it is a mistake to be too clever. The novels I write are suited to the comprehension of the 'young person,' and writing them brings me in a good income. Why, therefore, should I produce difficult books and exhaust my brains, only to find I have a smaller sale, because the young person refuses to read prose which demands a closer attention than she is prepared to give?"

"But art for art's sake?"

"You are very young," said the great man, indulgently. "I thought so myself once, but experience has knocked all that out of me. I wonder six years of Bohemia have not destroyed all your illusions."

"I am afraid I have but few left."

"Get rid of the remainder at your earliest convenience, or you will never be rich."

"You look at life in a very prosaic fashion."

"I do. It is the only way in which life bears looking at. Occasionally, for very shame, I do write a work into which I put my whole soul; but it commands the approbation of the minority and reduces my income. Therefore, if I desire to live comfortably, I must give the public what it desires—and what it desires is not my noblest thoughts; but my

most amusing. Believe me, my dear young friend, 'tis only a wealthy man who can afford to write his sermons on the 'art for art's sake' text."

I pondered over this remark for a few minutes, and then abruptly asked the novelist a leading question:

"Sir, you are famous; you make a good income; you are engaged daily in an occupation which you like. Tell me, now, if a young man desiring to enter the literary profession asked your advice, what advice would you give him?"

"I would tell him to be a clerk, a laborer, a grocer—anything but a literary man!" replied the novelist, emphatically.

"And your reason?"

"My dear sir, literature is a pleasure when we write for amusement; but when it becomes a means of livelihood 'tis converted into hard work. Pegasus can work in harness, but the sight is a painful one."

He arose from his seat, laid down his cigar, and began to pace up and down the room, talking volubly, being now thoroughly aroused by the interest of the subject of conversation.

"Besides, literature is very different now from what it was in the old days. Then, when a writer took the fancy of the public and went on producing thoroughly good work in his peculiar vein, the reading world generally gave him a permanent place in its affections. If a novelist once made a success and kept his work up to a reasonable standard of excellence, he was assured of at least a moderate income for the rest of his life. *Nous avons changé tout cela*. However clever a writer may be, the question

is, 'Will he endure?' Our successful novelists of to-day are not fixed stars, shining with a clear and steady light; they are meteors that flame across the literary sky and disappear. Of course I am speaking of the very youngest generation of writers—the elderly novelists amongst us secured their circle of readers in the halcyon days before the market was deluged by three-volume rubbish; but those who make a success now are, I think, unable to keep it up, owing to the incessant cry for novelty. Not novelty of plot or of style, but novelty of novelist. Every year in London must bring forth its birth. The new humor, the new journalism, the new dramatic school of unintelligibility—all fads of the day, which cannot and will not last, because of a generation afflicted with *ennui*. A writes a book which takes with the public, and it is a great success. All the world reads A. After a time they grow weary of him, and though his work is better and more mature, the something-new folk cry, "Oh! we are tired of A; we have read so many of his books. Let us find out what B can do. Then B goes through the same experience, only to yield place to C, who, in his turn, is succeeded by D. You perhaps doubt this statement; but it is true. The publishers themselves admit it."

"Still, when A, B, or C are at the height of their success, they can make lots of money and save up for a rainy day."

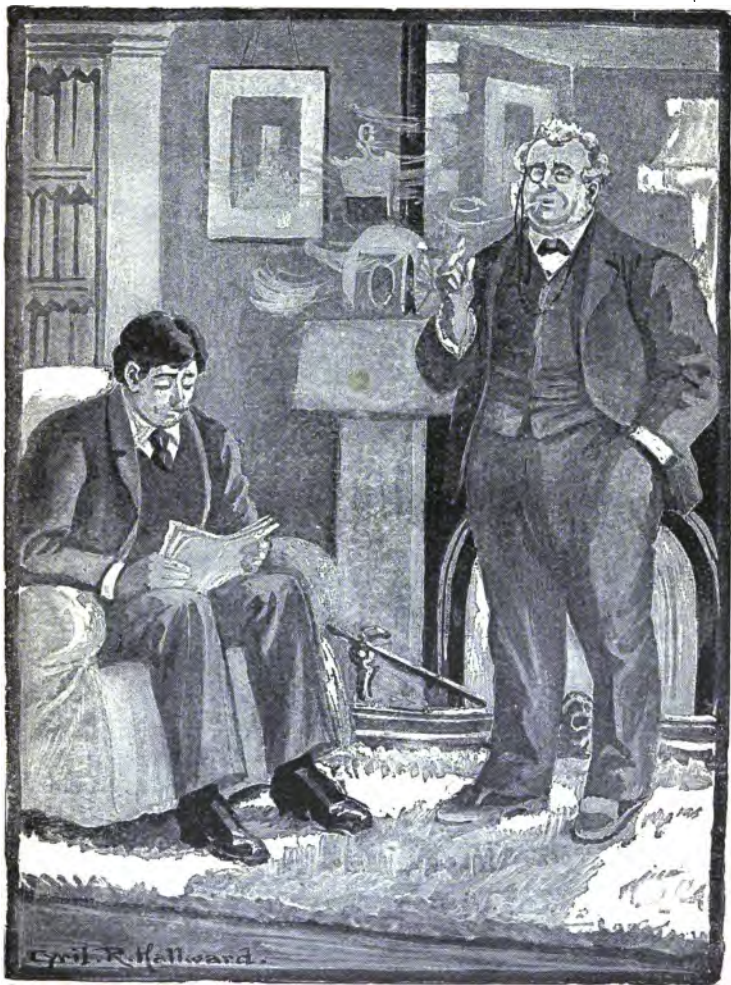
"So they can! But do they? Ah! my young friend, who is wise in prosperity? Literature, with rare exceptions, is not a paying business; and a commonplace merchant in the city works far less hard than a literary man, for twice or thrice the

income. No! I am what you call a successful novelist; but I have to work hard to maintain my position; and it takes all my brain-power, all my perseverance to keep my income up to high-water mark. Besides, the public are fickle; and my books, which sell so largely to-day, may be a drug in the market next year. It is all rubbish, what the newspapers say about fortunes being made out of novel-writing. No one ever made a fortune, at least what the world would call a fortune in this age of millionaires, by his pen yet. Dickens died worth money. Yes, but Dickens supplemented his books by his lectures; and I dare say made more out of the latter than the former. A literary man of to-day has hard work to make a competence; therefore, my young friend, I advise you to go back to the flesh-pots of the mercantile world, and leave fame, laurel-wreaths, and national tombstones alone."

"What eloquence!" said Halston, suddenly waking up; for he had been asleep and only heard the latter end of the discourse.

"What satire!" retorted the novelist, laughing; "but I always grow warm on the subject. I must be off now, as I have a heavy day's work to do to-morrow and require a good rest. Good-night, Halston! and you, sir. Come and see me next week, at this address, and bring your poems. I might be able to do something for you; but take my advice and go back to the desk. You'll find it more comfortable than a garret."

I own I was much cast down by this discourse, and it gave me considerable food for reflection on my homeward walk. This man—this successful



"AND MADE ME READ THOSE I THOUGHT THE BEST."

man—spoke with authority, and gave his vote against literature. After all, judging from my own small experience, the world of letters now seemed much less attractive than when I entered it first; but then I had gained none of the prizes which the Muse sometimes grudgingly bestows on her worshippers; whereas this man had made a great name and doubtless earned a good income. Yet even he, in the full flush of prosperity, deprecated the profession by which he made his livelihood. It would take me years before I could hope to occupy his position, if indeed I ever occupied it at all; and when I did succeed, I might speak as bitterly as he did. Success does not always bring happiness; so would it not be wiser for me to abandon this arid path to the Temple of Fame, which seemed but a tinsel edifice, and go back once more to the commonplace highway of everyday life, where one was more certain of being content?

“I will see if I can get my poems published,” said I, at length; “and if they succeed I will go on trying. If they fail—farewell, Bohemia.”

The next week, with a hopeful heart, for youth will be hopeful in spite of all rebuffs, I took my poems to the house of the successful novelist and solemnly presented him with the manuscript. He was as genial as ever, and made me read those I thought the best aloud to him, which I did in my best style. His verdict, I am pleased to say, was in my favor; though he certainly did not pronounce me a Hugo or a Shakespeare.

“I like your lyrics, very much,” he said frankly; “some of them are very dainty, even if not particu-

larly original. Most, I see, are echoes of our great poets; but that is rather a virtue than a fault. I cannot say you are a genius, for that is a large word, only too frequently misapplied; but you have considerable talent, though I am afraid you are hardly original enough to startle or charm the world; and unless you startle or charm the *fin de siècle* world, you will never make money. It is probable that I may be able to arrange for the publication of this; but I still hold to the advice I gave you the other night: 'Go back to the mercantile flesh-pots.'

"It all depends on the success or failure of my poems," I replied stubbornly, and retired with a feeling of depression, which even the near chance of my works appearing in the glory of print could not banish.

My newly found friend was as good as his word, for the poems were duly accepted by the firm of Hurran Brothers, and duly appeared in a very dainty edition. I must say my publishers dressed my Muse well, and gave her every opportunity of fascinating the public; so I was hopeful—very hopeful. Who could resist that charming volume, with its uncut edges, its delicately toned paper, its quaint tail-pieces and bizarre initial letters? Why, the verse read twice as well as when in the rawness of manuscript (for which remark I am indebted to the late Charles Lamb) and I was quite charmed with my own lines—in print. Alas! the book fell stillborn from the press. 'Twas not even noticed by the cruel critics, and the only notice I saw of my offspring was one that the volume was well got up. Not a word about my poems, not a word about the genius

I fancied I possessed. Oh! it was cruel, this silent contempt; and I was crushed to the earth with woe. I called on the publishers some weeks after the poems appeared, and they told me the book was a complete failure, as not more than twenty copies had been sold. Conceive my feelings, O hard-hearted world!



"I LEANED MY HEAD ON MY HANDS AND WEPT BITTERLY."

and pity my sorrows, if indeed you do not laugh at them instead!

I was a failure—a wretched, miserable failure!—and as the door of the publishers closed behind me, I felt that I was shut out forever from the Temple of Fame. I would now have to return home and eat humble pie—that detestable dish!—and think myself

lucky if my prophetic parent did not receive me with "I told you so!" as I was pretty certain he would. This, then, was to be the end of six years of penury, of constant effort, of incessant anxiety! Blame me, if thou wilt, O reader! pour thy scorn on me if thou carest to trample a bruised reed; but when I got home to my garret, I leaned my head on my hands and wept bitterly. I was not a dauntless young man, was I? The hero of a novel would not have wept. But think of those six years of bitterness, of starvation, of heart-sickness, which ended thus—in failure!

CHAPTER XVI.

FAREWELL, BOHEMIA!

“Is life worth living?” Not when you find the world refuses to accept you at your own valuation, which is naturally a very high one. “I am a genius,” said I confidently; and tried to prove the truth of this assertion by asking the world to read my little book of poems. The world—brutally candid as it ever is—glanced at my effusions, shrugged its shoulders, and returned the book to me with the cruel remark, “You are not a genius!” After that emphatic verdict I felt that ’twas no use appealing for justice to this generation, that I had better leave my poetry to the judgment of Posterity—with a capital P—and that the wisest thing I could do would be to evacuate Prague forthwith. At this time of my life I particularly wanted love and sympathy and consolation—none of which could I obtain in Bohemia—whereas, if I returned to Philistia and my male parent, I might secure all such desirable petting at the cost of a few tearfully expressed regrets. After all, a father is a father, however badly he plays the rôle; wherefore I determined—at my own expense—to produce the play of “The Prodigal Son,” with myself in the chief part. With this idea in my mind, I penned a noble letter to my parent, full of sorrow and sentiment, in which I explained my conversion—by six years of experience—to his views of

life, and casually mentioned that I would like to see the old place once more. I made this latter remark because I really did want to see my childhood's home again; besides, winter was coming on, my garret was chilly, and Mrs. Prass declined to give me scuttles of coal without money down; so, taking all things into consideration, I thought it best to hint to my father that there is no place like home.

The next post brought me a letter from my parent which filled my eyes with tears, so kindly was it worded. He did not say, "I told you so," or "As you made your bed, so you must lie on it," or "I have cut you off with a shilling;" but bade me return to the cot where I was born at express speed—said that he felt lonely without me, that my mother pined daily for my presence, and that if I came back all the past would be forgiven and forgotten. Kindest of fathers, how that letter cheered my heart! "Come," said I, as soon as my emotion permitted me to make a remark, "all is not yet lost! Life does not end at twenty-six, and there is balm in Gilead. I will take one last look round Bohemia, bid farewell to the follies of my youth, and return home to follow the path pointed out to me by Fate and father."

That night I began to read the parable of "The Prodigal Son," and if I did not finish it at the sitting 'twas because the end could not be seen through a mist of tears.

I had long come to the conclusion that it was not good for man to live alone, and my thoughts pointed strongly in the direction of marriage. If I could only find a Mrs. Peter to "mend my linen,

dry my tears," as Mr. Gilbert puts it, I felt that there would be nothing left for me to desire. Life is very lonely without friends, yet they are such uncertain characters—here to-day and gone to-morrow—that 'tis but little use depending upon them for companionship. But a wife—ah! that is quite a different thing. A good wife who loves her husband will stick to him through thick and thin; she will believe in him when every one else does not; she will soothe him when he is dreary, and laugh with him when he is merry. This sounds somewhat improbable, I admit, but there are such women in the world; the difficulty is to find them, and those men who are lucky enough to do so are the fortunate ones of this earth.

All my friends were scattered—some were in far countries, like Lionel and the signor; others were dead, like Rax and little Hunchback; a few were married and prosperous, like Eugene and Halston. Thus lacking company, I felt very miserable in that lonely garret, with no one to cheer me up, not even a dog or a cat; for I could not afford to keep a dog, and the cats were all occupied in crawling over the tiles, from whence they scorned my efforts to lure them. I therefore wanted a wife—a nice, kind, cosy, little woman—to love and cherish; but where to look for such a jewel I did not know. There is, unfortunately, no directory to tell one where to find so amiable a character; therefore all I could do was to trust to Fate and keep my eyes open. I suppose Fate must have heard me soliloquizing on the subject, for she made a note of it, and, with the intention of gratifying my desire, directed my steps toward the abode of "Wilderkind," where I met "Her."

Tw'as my last night in Bohemia, and I determined to celebrate it by going out to some festivity. I could not give a feast myself, as I had no one to ask to it, unless, indeed, I went into the highways and byways in search of starving Bohemians, of whom I no doubt would have found plenty.

"No," said I to myself, "I will enjoy myself at the expense of a friend to-night, and let my last memory of Bohemia be a bright one. Therefore will I call on 'Wilderkind,' who gives an 'At Home' this evening, and there I will doubtless meet with pleasant people, who will banish those dreary thoughts which have so depressed my soul of late."

But you will doubtless wonder at the strange name of my host. Well, it is not his real name, which I suppress, in case you might want to visit him—not that he would not be delighted to see you, but he is such a delightful host that were I to give his real name and address he would be quite worn out with receiving visitors. No, sir! no, madam! I do not mistrust you in any way, but I am generous enough to spare Wilderkind the trouble of receiving too many people, and selfish enough to keep him as much as possible to myself. As I say, 'tis not his real name, yet 'tis widely renowned nevertheless.

Wilderkind! Ah! you remember the name now? Of course you do. He is that delightful writer of fairy tales, the Hans Christian Andersen of England. Is not his name adored in the nursery, and, indeed, in the study also, by those whose youth is still so fresh in them that they still can appreciate his charming stories? That tale of "The Cork Fairy"—the Irish fairy who was born in Cork, was made

of cork, and, like Father Prout, floated down the stream of Time in a cork jacket—is it not a delicate fancy? Ariel might have written it, and read it aloud to an admiring circle of elves in the Athenian Forest before King Oberon and Her Fragility Queen Titania. But Wilderkind is the author of that dainty story of Prince, Princess, and Fay, which begins “once upon a time” and ends “so they lived happily ever afterward”; therefore ’tis to Wilderkind I allude, and it was at the house of Wilderkind I met “Her,” which meeting was as wonderful to my mind as any of those fancies of Fairyland whereof I speak.

Fortunately for my personal appearance, the money earned by some magazine articles had enabled me to redeem my festive garments from the avuncular relation who of late had taken care of them; therefore, in order to be in time for Wilderkind’s “At Home,” I sat down to my evening meal in evening dress. Tea and toast and evening dress somehow seemed incongruous, and my windy garret should certainly have been the dining-room of a club to harmonize fitly with my brave apparel. Evening dress also demanded a cab, but I, being poor, did not gratify that demand, and as it was a fine night walked to the hospitable abode of Wilderkind, which was in the direction of St. John’s Wood.

When I entered the house I was not quite sure if I had not lost my way, and arrived in some mysterious manner at the Tower of Babel; for never in my life did I hear such a confusion of tongues. Wilderkind knew everybody, and everybody was composed of all the nationalities in Europe, who made his house a common rendezvous to clash their various

languages together. English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish; it was like a Peace Congress after a European war, and my head was whirling like a teetotum at the clack of tongues, when luckily I espied Wilderkind, and plunged forward to meet him.

"Ah, my young friend Peter!" he said, shaking my hand; "this is most kind. Your first visit, is it not?"

"Yes, and likely to be my last."

"Indeed! how so?"

"I am leaving London—for ever."

"For ever! What is this you tell me?"

"I mean I have given up literature, or, rather, it has given me up, so now I return to my home."

Wilderkind reflected a few moments, then patted me kindly on the back.

"I shall be sorry to lose you, but I believe you are acting in a wise manner. You will come and see me before you go?"

"Certainly! some day next week."

"I am always at home in the afternoon. We can then have a chat. Meanwhile let me introduce you to Mr. Twinkle, who is ambitious for Fame. You may be able to give him some good advice."

This was said in so significant a tone that I saw Wilderkind wanted me to throw cold water on the aspirations of Mr. Twinkle, who was a babe of twenty-one with the conceit of twice that age. He was just the kind of youth who would set up for teaching his grandmother, and knew about as much of the world as an unhatched chicken. Moreover, he was wonderfully well dressed, thereby leading me to

suspect he was of the amateur species and possessed money, in which latter supposition I was correct, as I found out later on.

"Ah! how do?" he said, with so aggravating a drawl that I could have shaken his well-oiled head off his shoulders. "'Varsity man?"

"No."

"Ah! I belong to Pembroke myself—Cambridge, you know."

"No! I don't know Cambridge."

"I didn't mean it exactly in that light, you know. I mean, don't you know, you know!"

"I see—slang!"

"Well, I s'pose it is. Ah! you go in for writing and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"Yes; I do a little in that line."

"Ah! I'm thinking of offering a manuscript to the publishers myself."

"I hope you will get it accepted."

"Oh! that's all right, you know. Do the publishers pay well?"

"Not for first attempts."

"Really! I 'spose I shouldn't get more than a pony?"

"My dear Mr. Twinkle, you wouldn't even get a broken-kneed cab-horse!"

"Why, what d'ye mean?" he asked, changing color.

"Mean, sir? That ten to one your manuscript will be rejected."

He looked rather blank at this; but his native impudence came to his aid, and he smiled pityingly.

"Oh, I don't think so! It's a jolly good story. I shan't let it go under a pony."

"Pardon me if I am personal," I said, gravely looking at this innocent abroad; "but have you any money?"

"Oh, really! Well, my father allows me an income."

"Then if I were you, sir, I would stick to my father's income, and leave literature alone. Do you know what it is to be hard-up?"

"Rather! I got awfully into debt at the 'Varsity."

"I don't mean that kind of hard-upness," I said, smiling, for really his innocence was too refreshing. "Do you know what it is to starve?"

"Oh no!" he replied, looking startled, his drawl quite gone.

"Then pray to God you never will know! Mr. Wilderkind asked me to give you a word of



"IT'S A JOLLY GOOD STORY."

advice. Look at me, Mr. Twinkle! I have been trying for six years to make a living out of literature, and I have failed—failed to the verge of starvation. Next week I give it up altogether, and return to my home. You with your income will find the life easier than I did; but, believe me, if you are wise you will leave writing alone. If you have exceptional genius you may—mind you, I don't say you will, but you may—succeed; if you have not exceptional genius, go back

to your father, and be guided in all things by his wishes."

I think there was some good in the lad after all, for his 'Varsity languor had quite disappeared; he turned red and white by turns, and finally shook me by the hand.

"Thank you, sir; I am obliged for your advice. I didn't think it was as bad as that. Of course I see you know all about it. I am much obliged."

He shook my hand again and disappeared; but whether he went in for literature or not I do not know, as I have never seen nor heard of him since, but I am quite satisfied that he did not obtain "a pony" from the publishers for his manuscript; so if that juvenile masterpiece is in print, it must have been placed therein at the expense of its author.

After thus acting as a danger-signal to this would-be author, I sat down in a comfortable chair and wondered to myself who were all these queerly dressed people. Not having the gift of



"THAT LAMP-POST, SURMOUNTED BY A MOP, IS WINOWSKISKIWITZ. . . HE IS TALKING TO POLEAXE."

tongues, I could learn but little from their conversation, when luckily a fat man next to me began to talk; and as he seemed to know every one present, I asked him to give me a little information about celebrities he had met.

"There's a good deal of the foreign element here to-night," said the fat man, who turned out to be a very abusive person: "musicians, singers, composers, and all those sort of people. That lamp-post, surmounted by a mop of hair, is Winowskiskiwitz, the bassoonist, who produces comic effects with his instrument. You know it is called the clown of the orchestra, and Winowskiskiwitz can make you laugh quite as much as a farcical comedy. He is talking to Poleaxe, the celebrated musical critic, who does not know Beethoven from a bull's foot, but has a slashing style, and is retained by *The Midday Warbler* to satirize all artists and operatic managers who don't advertise largely in the paper. There goes Madame Frontali, the famous prima donna, who has absolutely no idea of music, but who can sing up to F in alt, and is famous on that account. She is the *chère amie* of Monsieur Wagerdiomas, who has founded a new school of music, which blends a trinity of German, Italian, and French art in one, like his name, which is made up of the heads and tails of three well-known composers' names. His new opera, "Le Sepulcre," is to be produced next season at Covent Garden, and Frontali sings the chief part, which is that of a ghoul. That little reptile is Lambert Buxton, the society mudraker, who writes all the nasty gossip for *The Five o'clock Tea*, and is noted for having been oftener horsewhipped than

any man of his age in London. Do you see yonder dumpy female dressed in red, who resembles a pillar-box? 'Tis Fanny Fiddleby, the lady novelist, who puts all her dearest friends into her books, which sell largely on account of the libel actions which the



"THAT LITTLE REPTILE."

"YONDER DUMPY FEMALE DRESSED
IN RED."

dearest friends constantly bring against her publishers. Leaning against the wall is Punkerley, who writes books of what they call the new humor, at which one laughs in a genteel fashion, and which prevents refined people indulging in vulgar mirth, such as is provoked by 'Pickwick Papers.' But really so

many people here are famous—in their own estimation—that I cannot enumerate them all.”

“Who is that red-headed man with a squint?”

“Oh, he writes poems after the style of Walt

Whitman, and has vowed to thrash the first critic who does not praise his yards of prose run mad. As the critics are weak, and he is strong, he is therefore spoken highly of by every paper in London.”

“And the man with the waxed mustache?”

“Pinderlop! He is the author of several libretti of comic operas, which he praises in *The Penwiper*, of which paper he is musical critic. Next him is Ankers, the noted actor, who has produced ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen,’ ‘The Yorkshire Tragedy,’ and several other plays which Shakespeare did *not* write.”



“THAT RED-HEADED MAN
WITH A SQUINT.”

“You seem to know every one,” I said, looking keenly at my informant. “May I ask who you are?”

“I am a critic.”

“I thought so, from the way in which you abuse every one.”

The fat man laughed uproariously.

“Pooh! my bark is worse than my bite. If critics

did nothing but pick out people's good qualities, instead of their bad, the world of Art would be twice as conceited as it is, and Lord knows it's bad enough already. Tell me, my young friend, have you ever seen a man sitting on a fallen horse to keep the animal quiet?"

"Yes, often."

"That is a critic; the horse is the author. Bless you, I have no ill-will against authors, though they will write books and send them for review; but I must sit on their heads, or there would be trouble. Abusive articles by critics are the dykes erected by wise men against the sea of three-volume shilling-shocker trash which threatens to overwhelm us. Printing was a blessing once, now it is a curse. But you don't appear to love critics; therefore I am safe in saying you are an author?"



"THE FAT MAN LAUGHED UPROARIOUSLY."

"Well, I am to some extent."

"I thought so. You look upon critics as mosquitos, which sting and worry, but do not kill. In fact, to take an illustration from the animal kingdom, critics are dogs and authors cats, therefore they are inces-

santly fighting. But we are your best friends, only you don't know it."

"No, I am sure we don't. You critics are always *in extremis*: you praise to excess or you abuse to excess. Why can't you carefully go through a book and pick out the good as well as the bad?"

"It is the fault of the authors themselves. They will write so many novels that the whole force of critics in the United Kingdom can't keep up with them. Fewer books, better criticisms; for then the critics would have time to read books carefully."

"Do you believe criticisms do any good?"

"Well, they don't do much harm at all events. The wisest plan for authors is not to read criticisms."

"I think the wisest plan would be for critics not to write them."

"Rubbish! Men must work."

"And women must weep. I expect your tribe have sent a good many female novelists into hysterics. 'Tis a shame to be so ungallant for filthy lucre."

"Ten shillings a column," said the fat man complacently; "deuced bad pay, considering the lot of rubbish we have to read."

After all, he was amusing, this critic, and there was a good deal of truth in what he said; but I grew weary of argument, so went in search of Wilderkind, whom I found standing near the door.

"Well, my young friend, are you going?"

"Not yet. I'll wait for the 'sweet i' the night,' with your kind permission; but, Wilderkind, would you mind introducing me to some one who hasn't

written a book, or painted a picture, or penned a criticism, or composed an opera, or——”

“Or done anything in fact?”

“Precisely! I’m so weary of being instructed, that I wish to meet a plain, homely person who knows nothing, except how to boil potatoes or say the alphabet correctly.”

“I presume you allude to the gentler sex?”

“Certainly, if the gentler sex in question is pretty.”

“Oh!” said Wilderkind dryly; “I thought you wanted a plain, homely person? Well, here is a charming girl who has come here to-night with her father. He is a decayed gentleman of Oxford University, who teaches for a livelihood.”

“And mademoiselle, his daughter?”

“Does nothing but look pretty and talk sense.”

“Lord, what a novelty! Please introduce me?”

“At once. Miss Helen Merle—Mr. Peter ——.”

Wilderkind, having achieved this introduction, hurried away, and I bowed to Miss Merle in deep confusion; for I was dazzled, bewildered, undone—in fact, I was in love. In love, and only introduced a minute? Impossible! Madam, I refer you to Kit Marlow, who was well versed in the erotic passion, and he—from his experience, I presume—made the following remark:

“He never loved who loved not at first sight.”

I will maintain the truth of that line against all the schools in Europe; for I, who pen these pages, have proved it to be true by experience. As I stood there blushing before that sweet face I felt the arrow of the

god penetrate my heart like an electric shock. I was no longer the melancholy, despairing Bohemian. I was Peter —, lover! and lover! and lover! Nothing else? Madam, where love is there is no room for aught else. If you do not agree with me on this ticklish point, you have never known the true Eros, but only his counterfeit.

Having recovered somewhat from the sudden attack of General Cupid, I sat down beside her, and we began to talk—that is, she talked, and I threw in a word now and then. It was all I could do, for somehow my brain was not in working order while in her vicinity. I was always under the impression, until that fatal moment, that I was a sensible man, but now I was convinced I was an idiot; for who but an idiot would blush, grin inanely, shuffle his feet, and find nothing more original to talk about than the weather? My wife says I am exaggerating the foolishness of my behavior at this first interview; that, on the whole, I was very well conducted and pleasant; but then, my wife is so ridiculously prejudiced in my favor. If a man refuses to believe that I am not as witty as Sydney Smith, as original as Ibsen, as clever as Shakespeare, as well mannered as Chesterfield, as fascinating as d'Orsay, she puts that man down as a fool, and never, never again does he enter the doors of Primrose Villa, where—but bless my soul, here I am revealing matrimonial opinions when as yet I am not within sound of wedding bells!

At all events, she was charming, and her conversation was as bright as her eyes, which were alarmingly brilliant. Being a stranger in the land—I mean in the room—she knew no one either personally

or by reputation, so I gave her a second-hand edition of my critic's opinions. She laughed, and said I was cynical, whereat I blushed, and denied I was anything so horrible; then she said—but there, I cannot tell you exactly what she said, but it was a bewildering mixture of silvery voice, silvery laugh, and silvery everything else. Yet, after all, what we talked about was commonplace enough: 'twas only Love which threw this glamour over everything; for never did I spend such a delightful evening. I kept wondering how I had managed to exist up till that interview; why I had not died in early youth for lack of that wonderful feeling of perfect delight in her society. I seemed to have known her, and been in love with her all my life; my introduction to this divinity was already centuries distant in my memory; and I went on longing and loving and looking, as if I had been engaged in no other occupation since my cradle days.

Therefore do I believe in the theory of transmigration; for surely in some other life than this I must have loved Helen and been loved by her, since the newly born love of that evening seemed already so old. Yes! I am sure our souls had met somewhere in the past—perhaps under the burning sky of ancient Egypt, by the many-pillared temple of Karnak, or in some marble temple of serene Hellas, where she ministered at the altar of Athena Glaukopis; or in Rome, Imperial Rome, when it was "I, Caius, take thee, Caia." Nay, I doubt not she was some dainty Florentine dame, whom I wooed with serenade of voice and viol on summer nights long ago, or perchance a sparkling lady of King Louis'

court, who loved me as a *Mousquetaire du Roi*. But wherever it was, whenever it was, we had met, loved, lived, and died together in the past; and now that old, old, centuries old love had re-awoke from sleep in our souls to once more join us in marriage. Yes, I believe in transmigration—that weird doctrine of the wise Greek—and so would you had you felt as I did when I fell in love so suddenly and unexpectedly with Miss Helen Merle.

Every minute seemed to draw us closer together; we became quite confidential, and I told her all about myself, thereby gaining her sweet pity, which nearly caused me then and there to fall down and worship her. Fortunately the presence of the polyglot crowd restrained me from such undignified conduct, and she told me about her father, who was a tutor, and gained his livelihood by coaching this one and that one at the rate of five shillings an hour. Alas! I saw that her dress was poor, though tasteful; that her shoes were ready-made, and that her white gloves had been cleaned with bread-crumbs; but she was an angel for all that. As to her poverty, I also was poor, and therefore an adept at reading the signs of poverty in others; so here were two young creatures, poor in the coinage of the world but rich in the gold of love. Helen has admitted to me since, with many blushes, that she also had carried out Marlowe's line and loved me at first sight, which again proves the truth of my transmigration theory.

Alas! how quickly the moments flew by—so quickly that I thought 'twas only ten o'clock when her father came towards us to take "Her" home. He said it was midnight, and convinced me of the



"EVERY MINUTE SEEMED TO DRAW US CLOSER TOGETHER."

1000
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fact by reference to a Waterbury watch, which advertisements assert is never incorrect. Helen introduced me to her father; and with deep duplicity I mentioned to him that, having heard he gave lessons, I would like to see him about something—I did not know what it was—I wanted to learn. He gave me a card, mentioned when he would be at home, and asked me to call. Call! If that home of Helen's had been in the dominions of the Great Cham I would have stolen a Cook's ticket and gone, or taken a pedestrian tour across Europe, and defrayed expenses by writing a book called "Forty Days on My Legs." Then Mr. Merle took her away, and I was left lamenting, with nothing to remember her by save a faded rose, which fell by accident from the bosom of her dress.

"Good-by," said Wilderkind to me, as I put on my cloak in his hall. "How did you like the only person in the room who did nothing?"

"How did I like her?"

"Great heavens!"

"I can't help it, Wilderkind; it came on me suddenly."

"I see the age of miracles is not yet past."

"Not if you call love a miracle."

"I certainly do call it a miracle. So you are going to act a far more charming fairy tale than any I have written?"

"I—I—don't know."

"But I do. I can see it in your eyes. But be careful, Peter; be wise. Go home to your father; earn a good income; and then—ah! then, my boy——"

I grasped his hand, and said "Good-night," for I

could neither talk nor listen to talk any more. I wanted to be alone with the stars and my own thoughts, which latter consisted of "Helen, Helen, Helen!" I am ashamed to say how long I sat up that night staring at the moon, and scribbling on sheets of paper about love and dove, and above and glove, with a constant refrain of Helen, Helen, Helen! I had the disease badly; there was no doubt about it; for I sat up raving and writing till I was quite worn out, and then threw myself on my truckle-bed to dream of Helen, Helen, Helen!

Perhaps you will sneer at all these rhapsodies? But no! only very young men will do that; for women, of whatever age, are always in favor of romance. Lovers will not sneer, because they are of the same mind with regard to the perfections of one another; nor will married men, for they too have been in Arcady and made fools of themselves. Therefore, with the exception of callow youth, which does not count, I am sure of sympathetic readers; for all will remember the days they went a-courting, when Phyllis was an angel, and the Golden Age commenced anew for them on earth. O Love! how lightly thou art talked about, but how terrible is thy divinity! 'Tis sweet, but awesome; and tis as well thou comest but once in a lifetime; for no mortal could bear the glory of thy presence again. Thou art the enchanter who transforms the world, who changes base metal to gold, who transforms the country wench into a Cleopatra, the fool into a hero; yet we creatures of a day talk lightly of thee and thy terrible power, when we should remove our shoes, cover our eyes, and kneel humbly in the presence of thy divinity!

CHAPTER XVII.

A ROSE OF ARCADEE.

'Tis as well I am nearing the end of this book; for, by St. Cupid! I can write of nothing but love, which is, I am afraid, not the kind of reading you care about. A dinner with one course of sweets is enjoyable, but a dinner with several courses of sweets is disappointing—not to say bilious; therefore, if I continue the rhapsodies with which I finished the last chapter, you will no doubt consider the price of this volume as so much money wasted. But I would have you know, gentle reader, that I am writing the Comedy of Bohemia—a somewhat grim comedy, maybe—and true comedies always end in marriage—therefore I must speak of marriage, and of the love which led up to it. With your usual sagacity you will doubtless understand that I speak of myself and of Helen: you are right in both cases; for who am I, that I should escape the common fate of mankind—matrimony?

I need hardly say that I called on Mr. Merle as soon as I possibly could, ostensibly to ask him to look over some manuscript, really to see Helen, and while he corrected my bad grammar in one room, I and his daughter talked Chinese metaphysics in the other. What! you do not understand Chinese metaphysics? Wait till you are in love, my friend, and you will find your knowledge embrace that erudite

science in the most surprising fashion. During my last week in Bohemia I saw a good deal of Helen, and my love disease, instead of becoming cured, only increased in virulence, which was not to be wondered at, seeing that every other day I drank in fresh draughts of the sweet poison.

At last the time came when I had to go home to my father and make my peace with him; so, after saying—not “good-by,” but *au revoir* to my dear Helen, I took the train from Waterloo and went homeward to the fleshpots of Egypt. Alas! 'twas the same line on which I had travelled so merrily toward Bohemia, filled with a longing for fame; but now six weary years had elapsed, and I was again in a third-class carriage rolling through the same country, and longing for marriage, which was a much more sensible thing to wish for.

'Tis not to the point, else would I describe the welcome home to the prodigal, which entailed the killing of the fatted calf on the part of my father, and many tears of joy on the part of my mother. How is it that mothers are always fondest of their wildest offspring. The good son who never causes his mother a single pang is never loved so much as the naughty boy who worries her life out. I need not make this comparison except in a general sense, as I have no brother; but if the parallel can be extended to sisters—I possess two—it holds good. My mother loved my sisters, who were excellent girls and worthy of her affection; but she adored me—wild, scampish me, and had I come home poet laureate I could not have been received with more gratitude and joy.

My father did not lecture me on my folly—for

which I felt profoundly thankful, as he had me at a disadvantage, and I could positively show no cause why I should not be publicly reproved for my misdoings. But he had a kindly heart, my dear father, and compassionated the fallen, so we might have parted yesterday on the best of terms, for all the difference in his manner toward me. He mentioned that he would be glad to see me back in his office, and if I conducted myself well and learned the business—which was that of a lawyer—thoroughly, he would take me into partnership as soon as I passed my legal examinations. Of course I was only too glad to obey him in this matter, so back I went to that perilously high stool, and renewed my acquaintance with Chitty and Coke, after being strangers to their dry pages for six years.

Rome was not built in a day, and I own I found the law as distasteful as ever; but I was anxious to marry Helen, which was a wonderful incentive to study. Without knowing my business as a solicitor, I could not hope to make an income, and without an income I could not hope to marry Helen: therefore, 'twas her image which beckoned me along that dull legal road so thickly strewn with stumbling-blocks of dull legal books. No more did I wander in the flowery meadows of literature; no more did I invoke the Muse and cudgel my brain for rhymes—nay, sterner was the goddess I now worshipped, and Themis with her scales was ever before my eyes, save when the gracious presence of Helen took her place. Still I did indulge in poetry when 'twas necessary, and certainly poetry was very necessary when I wrote to Helen.

Our correspondence was as long as that which generally appears in the newspapers on some queer subject during the silly season. It was all "I love you! I love you! I love you!" on my part, which sounds as though my ideas were limited; but when you consider that hundreds of three-volume novels are written on the same subject, you will surely perceive that the text is one which can be preached upon to any extent. Therefore, on that delicious subject did I write to Helen, and her letters in reply were all that I could desire—with the exception that I found them too short. What indeed is eight pages to a lover who longs for sixteen?—particularly when he wants quantity and not quality, and is perfectly satisfied if his angel-correspondent writes as above, "I love you! I love you!" over and over again, like an exercise in an infant-school copy-book.

All this time I had not dared to tell my father of my hopes, and he, good man, having left Arcady these many years, failed to notice in me the symptoms of a distracted mind, which he had experienced himself in the days when Plancus was Consul. But my dear mother had keener eyes—all women have, in love matters; so, suspecting the truth, she set herself to work and worried my secret out of me. Then, when I made a clean breast of it, she wept bitterly, and said no woman was worthy of her boy; whereupon I demonstrated to her in the most glowing language that Helen was the most perfect woman who ever existed. I showed her the sweet letters I had received, and my mother said they were nice letters. Nice! O great heavens, what a feeble adjective to use in connection with "Her"! But then

mothers are never on the woman's side in their sons' courtships; and my dear mother was so dazzled by my brilliant qualities—which I never knew I possessed till she described them—that she could see no one in the world worthy to mate with such a superfine creature as her maternal imagination made me out to be. At last she advised me to tell my father, which I did with fear and trembling.

I am glad to say that he took a common-sense view of the matter, and put me through a severe examination as to the name of the lady, the status of her father, the amount of marriage settlement likely to be made, and such-like matter-of-fact things, to all of which I gave extremely unsatisfactory replies. At least my father thought so when I said there was no money in the case, and he evidently did not consider ardent love a sufficient substitute for the lack of coin. When I described the father, however, he was astonished to discover that Mr. Merle was an old college chum, who had saved him—my father—from finding a watery grave in the Isis. Merle had once been very well off, but had gone to what Mr. Mantalini called the "demnation bow-wows" through drink, and my father had not seen him for many years. He was much affected when I told him of the hardships which Mr. Merle was undergoing in London, and never until that moment had I dreamed my father was sentimental.

"Dear! dear!" he said in an agitated tone, walking up and down the room, "so that is what Merle has come to. A fine dashing fellow he was in the old days, and now to think of him teaching for five shillings an hour! Oh, I cannot let this go on! He

saved my life, Peter—yes, he saved my life! I must see what I can do. And you love his daughter. Strange! strange!”

“I don’t think so, sir. If you only saw her, you——”

“I’m not making the remark in that way. I am thinking how strange that you should fall in love with the daughter of my old friend. Well! well! Yes, I’ll do it! Certainly I will do it!”

“Do what, sir?”

“Write to Merle, and ask him to come for a few days and see me.”

“With Helen?” I asked, my heart beating anxiously.

“Of course, with Helen.”

Oh, joy! oh, bliss! oh—no, I do not know what words to use, in order to do justice to this matter. An hour ago Helen had seemed far away, and my chance of marrying her a small one, but now—enough! Never will I rail at Dame Fortune again. I have called her names, unpleasant names, for which I now humbly apologize. Helen was coming; I would have her all to myself, and in fancy I could hear the wedding bells speak to me, as of old Bow Bells had chimed to Dick Whittington, only the words were adapted to my hoped-for future. “Turn again, Benedict, the married man!” rang those wedding-bells of fancy; and they chimed in mine ears until I felt that our house, like Caliban’s island, was full of sweet noises.

Ah, me! how delightful were those days of expectation and longing! ’Twas the Indian summer of youth; for after those six wintry years in Bohemia,

never had I thought it would be possible for me to be happy again. I had deemed the golden age of careless happiness to be past forever, and lo! by some trick of fate it had reverted to its golden prime. In fact, I began to think it had never ceased; that those six years of London hardships were but the dream of a night; that Bohemia had not existed; that Eugene and Rax and Mrs. Prass were all mythical personages, who had played their parts in some strange phantasmagoria of the brain, and then dissolved into thin air. But no! Memory, stern goddess, asserted herself at times, and I would wake at night with a shudder, thinking to find myself in that windy garret of penury, which was now, happily, a thing of the past. Yes, Bohemia had existed, but love was the golden bridge which spanned that dark abyss of poverty and let the delightful dreams of my youth troop over to join the still more delightful dreams of love. "I also have been in Arcady!" Nay, there was no "have been" in the matter—I was now dwelling in Arcady, and soon would Phyllis, with her bright smile, come dancing o'er the daisied lea.

She came at the end of seven days, and with her—heaven! Was my father glad to see her father? Did they talk over old Oxford days? Did they agree to let the son of one wed the daughter of the other? I know not, for I thought of nothing but Helen.

She was my world, and for all else I cared not two straws. O my dearest! come, kiss me kiss me!—Lord! Pegasus, pull up, or there will be a smash presently.

A smash? Yes! You know, the critics do not care about such rhapsodies—they call them rank nonsense. In fact, my dear Pegasus, when that lover-like raving is in print, I am prepared to bet you a peck of good dry provender that they *do* call it rank nonsense. Well, forewarned is forearmed:



“DID THEY TALK OVER OLD OXFORD DAYS?”

let them say what they please; I can bear all such cruelties of the pen—with Helen.

Mr. Merle was not now quite so addicted to the flowing bowl as he had been, and my father in the goodness of his heart, and in part payment of that debt of life-saving—if indeed, such debt could ever be paid off—offered to make him an allowance of one hundred a year, which, together with what he earned, would keep him in comparative comfort. The poor

old fellow accepted the offer with joy, and said that neither he nor his daughter would ever forget such kindness.

"As to that," said my father, who had taken a great fancy to Helen, "I don't think my son will ever forget your daughter."

"Indeed!"

"Oh! my dear Merle, have you forgotten the days of your youth? Cannot you see that those two young people are madly in love with one another?"

"In love! but I can give my daughter no marriage portion."

"Helen does not require a marriage portion. Her own good qualities are sufficient. I hope some day to take my son into partnership, but I think that as he is now fairly on the way to earn a good income, you had better let him take your daughter into partnership—for the term of his natural life."

So it was arranged, and, with the full concurrence of all, I was permitted to engage myself to Helen; therefore, for once in history did the course of true love run smooth. Hitherto, Fortune had treated me in a most unkind fashion; but now she rewarded me richly for all the ills of the past. I was young, healthy, on the road to—if not fortune, at least a comfortable competence, and last, but not least, I was going to marry the only woman I ever loved: so, with all these blessings showering down on me, I would have indeed been an insatiable mortal, did I not feel perfectly satisfied.

Those were merry days, I vow, when Helen and I wandered that golden summer about the countryside. We strolled along side by side down pleasant

lanes, we sauntered by the side of the soft flowing river, we idled under the boughs of ancient trees, and altogether conducted ourselves in quite an Arcadian fashion. What we talked about is not worth setting down here, nor do I suppose you desire our prattle to be set down. A genuine lover's conversation is about the most idiotic thing yet invented, and is only interesting to the parties principally concerned therein. Those brilliant dialogues worthy of Sheridan, which one reads in certain novels, pretend to be the actual words spoken by two young creatures who love one another passionately; but 'tis all idealized, for were the genuine words of Edwin and Angelina reported faithfully by the phonograph—why, the audience would be speedily scattered to the four winds of heaven. Therefore, being a truthful man, I refuse to idealize our conversation in shady lanes, or under ancient trees, and, not being of a cruel nature, I spare you the pain of telling you what I said to her and what she said to me.

One thing I did in those days; and that was, write poetry. In spite of my flight from Parnassus, I am glad to say that Erato still visited me, though never when Themis and her dull law-books were present. But when I was in company with Helen the Muse touched my lips with a burning coal from the altar, and at times I wrote such verses as these, which Helen thought, and thinks so still, to be worthy of Tennyson. Probably she was wrong, but 'tis not for me to contradict a lady; therefore, I hereby place those verses before the critical eyes of my readers, so that they can judge for themselves.

A ROSE OF ARCADEE.

I.

Once, in the cool of morning hours,
I wandered o'er the dewy lawn,
And spied a flower amid the flowers
As fresh and fragrant as the dawn;
I plucked the bud and gave to thee,
That dainty rose of Arcadee.

II.

You placed it in your bodice neat,
A dewdrop from its deep heart fell;
Around thee spread a perfume sweet,
And then behold, a miracle!
From breast to face it seemed to be
Transferred, that rose of Arcadee.

III.

I clasped your hand, I kissed your cheek;
You faintly smiled with downcast eyes,
And guessed the words I could not speak,
With blushing face of glad surprise;
Then, with a kiss, you gave to me
Yourself! the rose of Arcadee!

But enough of the *Ars Amoris*. Ovid, I will study thee no more, but rather learn the marriage service, a knowledge of which is necessary for the step I now propose to take. Alas! while writing, I speak in the present, but that has become the past long years ago, for we have now been married at least a decade, and if our love is not so romantic as it was in those days of courting, 'tis at least as fond and foolish. Yes, those wedding-bells of fancy have changed to the chimes of reality, and they clamor

and clash in the old church tower as I lead my Helen, veiled in bridal white, down the aisle to the strains of the Wedding March.

'Twas a merry breakfast, I vow, as merry as those we sometimes partook of in Bohemia, when one of us, by an unusual run of luck, was rich in



"AARON WAS MY BEST MAN."

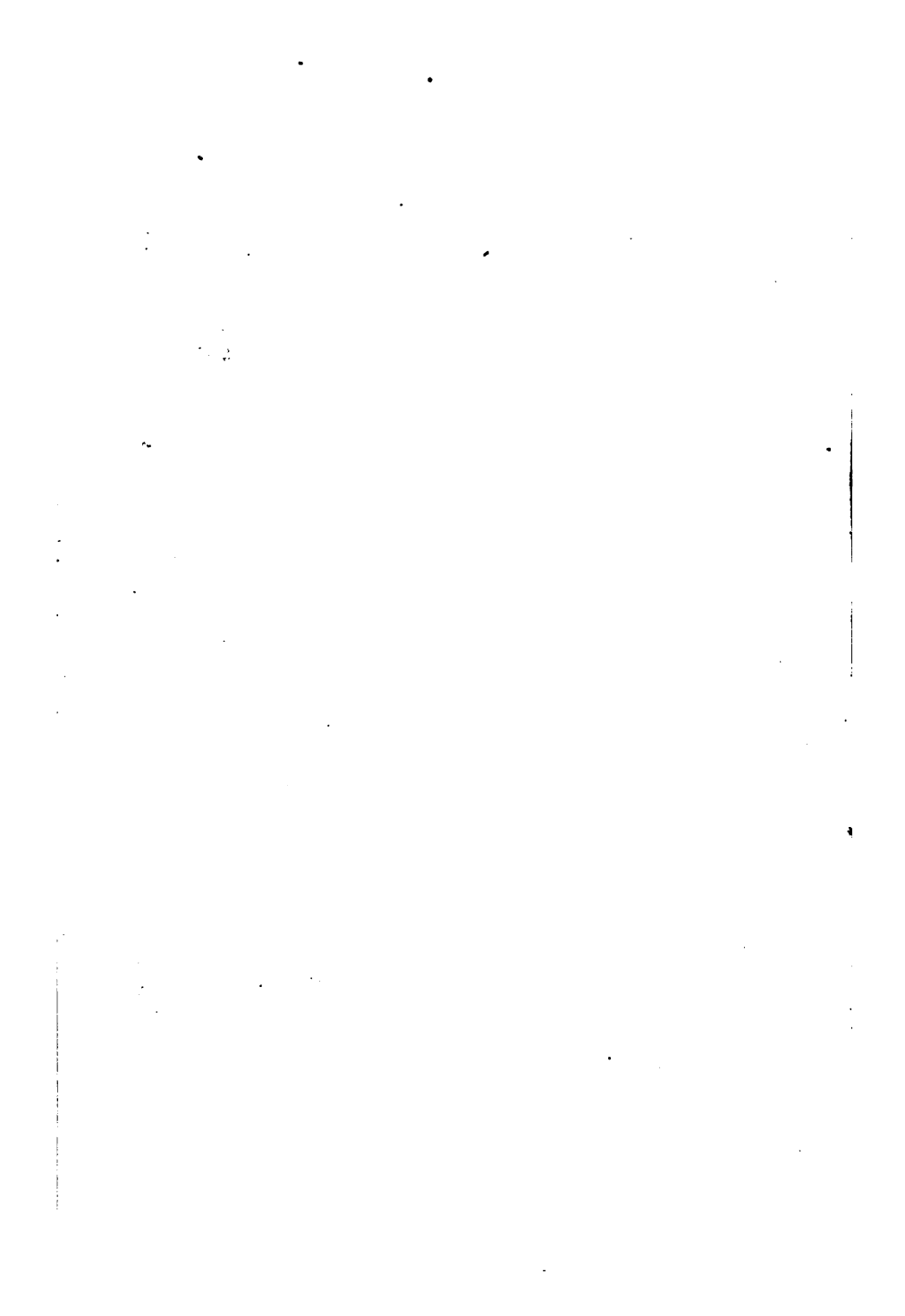
specimens of the Queen's head. Aaron was my best man, and for the nonce left behind him his broken heart, which was not desirable for a merry-making. Eugene was also present with his wife, and Halston, who was for the moment a bachelor, his better-half having gone to Paris for a week or so. I saw around me, merry and well-fed, those faces I had so often beheld despairing and famine-stricken, which was certainly a change for the better. Then I looked at Helen—at Mrs. Peter, for she now occupied that proud position—and thanked God for having guided me so safely

through the shoals and reefs of the stormy Ocean of Life to this quiet anchorage.

Laughter! speeches! congratulations! toasts! and then "good-by" to all, for the honeymoon. We went to Ventnor, and there, in that picturesque little town, we lived out our honeymoon for a week; but



IN ARCADEE.



I vow that the sentimental honeymoon hath endured even unto these days when I pen this page.

I am a steady old paterfamilias now, jogging along the highway of love in a contented fashion, with Helen beside me; and yet, when I turn over these pages, my youth comes back to me. Oh, the joy and dalliance of that time, in spite of its poverty! but, after all, 'tis best to look back at it through the rose-colored spectacles of memory, for I would not care to experience the reality again. 'Tis too bitter, too pitiful, too cruel for endurance, and if I can say I too have lived in Bohemia, I also can thank God for being out of it, and thank him also for home, wife, and children, which are the dearest treasures a mortal can possess.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FABLE OF THE OLD MAN AND HIS ASS.

'TIS impossible to please everybody, which is a very annoying thing, especially for those good-natured folk who would be at peace with all mankind. Alas! I am one of the amiable people in question, and I would not fight with a worm, much less my fellow-man; therefore, when I finished writing these sketches of *Life in Bohemia* I was doubtful as to the wisdom of publishing them. Unfortunately, I have a bad habit of telling the truth, which is a sure way of provoking hostility; and as in these pages I have told the truth about the only corner of Bohemia I am acquainted with, I am afraid such candor—however praiseworthy from a moral point of view—may meet with some blame. The plain unvarnished truth is always unpopular, and that is why she is imprisoned at the bottom of a well; therefore it would doubtless have been better for me to have drawn upon my imagination for facts rather than on my memory. Had I told a nice, sugary story, all rosewater and fine speaking, my reminiscences of Bohemia would have certainly read more agreeably; but to blurt out the truth in a bluff, honest fashion is, I am afraid, likely to cause me trouble.

I own I was very much perplexed over the matter, as I had no wish to sow dragons' teeth, and raise up a goodly crop of enemies; so, in this dilemma,

I thought it wisest to send the manuscript to Eugene for his opinion. He kept it a week, and then wrote me a letter asking me to come up to town in order to see him and discuss the matter. Mrs. Peter is very fond of London, and urged me to accept this invitation at once, as she remarked so much more could be said by the mouth than by the pen. With this view of the matter I concurred; so, in company with my wife, I went up to London and occupied Eugene's spare bedroom for a few days.

"I couldn't write you my advice about that manuscript," he said, when we met, "for my letter would have been as long as the Book of Lamentations, and quite as dismal."

"Well what do you think of it?"

"Think! Oh, I think a hundred and one things, some of which I will tell you to-night, when the ladies have retired and we are alone—alone in London with spirits and tobacco."

I was very willing to assent to this proposition, for there is nothing in this world I love so much as a midnight chat with an old chum. One is so much more confidential at night than in the daytime. At the witching hour of twelve o'clock your friend unbosoms himself about his sorrows, his desires, his joys; admits you freely into the secret chambers of his soul. But next day he shuts the door of his heart, makes no reference to the midnight interview, and becomes once more the man of the world, who does not wear his heart on his sleeve. There is some magic about the night which melts the most frigid soul, and I therefore knew that over our pipes Eugene would give me his candid opinion.

Somewhere about ten o'clock then, our wives went upstairs to talk babies or husbands—both of whom I am certain they would speak well of—and I was left alone in the smoking-room with Eugene. We pulled our comfortable arm-chairs up closer to the fire—for 'twas late autumn,—and having lighted our pipes and mixed our whiskeys—with soda, of course,—prepared to talk.

Relatives are proverbially plain-spoken, and when a man makes a fool of himself—as we are all apt to do on occasions—I know of nothing more exasperating than the brutally plain remarks made by his nearest and dearest, who carefully inform the victim that they only speak thus unpleasantly for his good. Eugene was in no way related to me, save by the common brotherhood of Father Adam; but so long had he known me that he quite looked upon himself in the light of a fraternal relative, and took advantage of this fictitious position by sparing my pride in no way; which candor, although not quite palpable, was accepted by me with the utmost meekness. I merely make this statement so as to explain to my readers the reason I did not arise and smite Eugene for his very rude remarks on my personal affairs during the ensuing interview, which is here faithfully reported by me. Had it not been for the softening influence of the hour, of memory, and of the diluted Scotch, I am afraid we would have parted in anger; but, as it was, I listened quietly to Eugene's admonitions, and accepted them in the spirit in which they were given, which I am sure was a kindly one.

“You see, Peter,” said Eugene, after an ominous

silence, "'tis rather hard for me to speak plainly about your manuscript."

"Why so?"

"Because it will force me to tell you a few plain truths, in which case——"

"You think I shall be offended. No, my dear Eugene, you need have no fear on that score. Ours is not a friendship of yesterday, and the ills we have endured together have, I hope, cemented our comradeship sufficiently to enable us to speak openly to one another."

"In that case, I will speak openly," said Eugene, with firm determination; "and if you lose your temper I will throw this cushion at your head, and bury your corpse in the back-garden. Candidly speaking, Peter, I like your sketches of our Bohemian life very much; but——"

"But what?"

"There's a trifle too much of teaching your grandmother about them."

"What a nasty way of putting it! However, as you have chosen your text, pray let us have the sermon."

"Beastly bad temper you have, Peter. Remember my threat about the cushion, which I will assuredly fulfil if you don't behave in a more amiable fashion."

"The sermon! the sermon!"

"Don't be in a hurry, I am coming to it; but first tell me, why are you so very plain-spoken concerning Bohemia?"

"Because I desire to describe the Bohemia of fact, not of fancy."

"Still, you might have softened a thing here and there."

"And so turn reality into romance?"

"Well, the world is fond of romances."

"Of course it is. The masses love the truth no more than does the individual. I could doubtless have told a charming story of Bohemia: of genius conquering all difficulties: of the helping hand given to men of letters: of fanciful loves and joyous suppers! Yes, it would have been charming and most attractive; but so untrue."

"My good youth, we don't want the fierce searchlight which beats upon the throne turned on to the garret and the gutter."

"Eh! why not? Alsatia is always picturesque."

"Alsatia, yes! Political exiles, brilliant swash-bucklers, nut-brown maids, adventures after the style of Dumas. Different, I think, from your dismal assemblage of starving geniuses and pale-faced girls."

"Oh, if you want to look at Bohemia through rose-colored spectacles——"

"No, I don't," interrupted Eugene, quickly. "To quote that Latin sentence you are so fond of using, '*Et ego in Bohemia fui.*' I know the City of Prague as well as you do, and what you have set down is perfectly true. Still, you have not even attempted to 'paint the lily.'"

"No, I have not; and in that followed Shakespeare's advice."

"My poor Peter! in this book I foresee a rod for your back."

"The deuce you do! But *apropos* of your grandmother idea."

"Now we come to the sermon," said Eugene gayly, shifting himself into a more comfortable position. "My dear Peter, don't you think you lay down the law a little too strongly in your remarks about literature?"

"I only speak from my own experience."

"Quite so; but your experience, my friend, has been that of the garrets. I don't think those who inhabit the drawing-rooms find literature such a starving profession as you make it out to be."

"I suppose not, when they get to the drawing-rooms; but unless your Bohemian has money, he must begin at the garrets, like every one else."

"True enough; but you must remember that such poverty is merely the furnace out of which the gold of genius comes refined. If your literary man had nothing but tea and comfortable advice all his life, ten to one he would not write half so well."

"Possibly; but let me tell you a fable, Eugene. There was once, in the old days, when humanity was simpler than it is now, a man who heard of a cliff on the bosom of which gleamed a precious diamond. Being avaricious, he determined to obtain this diamond, and devoted his whole life to the search. Many hardships did he undergo, many perils did he escape, many sorrows did he experience while looking for that famous gem. At length, when he was old and gray, he came to the enchanted valley, and saw the diamond gleam on the cliff. With difficulty and pain, he climbed up and secured the treasure; but the diamond—the much-vaunted diamond—turned out to be but a worthless crystal."

"And the moral of your fable, Mr. *Æsop*."

“That the game is not worth the candle, my optimistic friend. Granted that a man does become famous, is he the happier for it? No. Is he the richer for it? You will say ‘Yes,’ but I say ‘No’; and why? because his increased income only meets his increased



“WHEN HE WAS OLD AND GRAY, HE CAME TO THE ENCHANTED VALLEY.”

expenditure. He is famous, granted. He writes a novel which takes him eight or nine months of hard work. Well, it is first bought by a newspaper syndicate, who pay the author, say, five hundred pounds for the right to run it as a serial. Then the publishers, at the most, give another five hundred pounds

on account of the book rights. Mind you, I am taking the license of quoting big terms. Altogether the author out of his eight months' work obtains a thousand pounds; and that only if he is in the first rank of authors."

"Well, you can't deny that a thousand a year is excellent pay."

"Not for the payment of a unique talent. If your author devoted those brains which manufactured the novel to business—always supposing he had a capacity for it—he would make double the money for the same expenditure of brain-power.

"Ah, my friend, there is a flaw in your argument. 'Always supposing he had a capacity for it;' but how few authors have the slightest idea of business. If a man is formed by Nature to work at one special thing, let him do so by all means and make what he can out of it; but let him not take up another line alien to his talents, for in that case he would make next to nothing."

"I do not deny that there is some truth in what you say, Eugene; but look what the author has to undergo to arrive at that thousand a year—poverty, hardship, despair, anxiety; whereas the merchant, as a rule, begins as a clerk, and works his way upward on at least a sure salary."

"I suppose merchants' clerks have their sorrows as well as other men."

"No doubt; but he is at least spared the mental anxiety attendant on intellectual work."

"My good sir," said the artist, ironically, "you evidently desire your author fellow to be wrapped up in cotton-wool, and be spared the common lot of

humanity. Man is born to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and if one man undergoes a harder apprenticeship to his trade than another, that is his own fault, or that of the line he takes up."

"Then why does a man take up the line of literature, in which the blanks are so many and the prizes so few?"

"Why did you take it up?"

"Because I thought I was one of the chosen."

"Precisely; and every man who takes it up thinks the same. My dear Peter, you may spare yourself the trouble of acting as a danger-signal on the road which leadeth to Bohemia, for men will go there in spite of your warnings."

"And find I have spoken the truth."

"No doubt; in which case they also will act as danger-signals, and be equally disregarded by the rising generation."

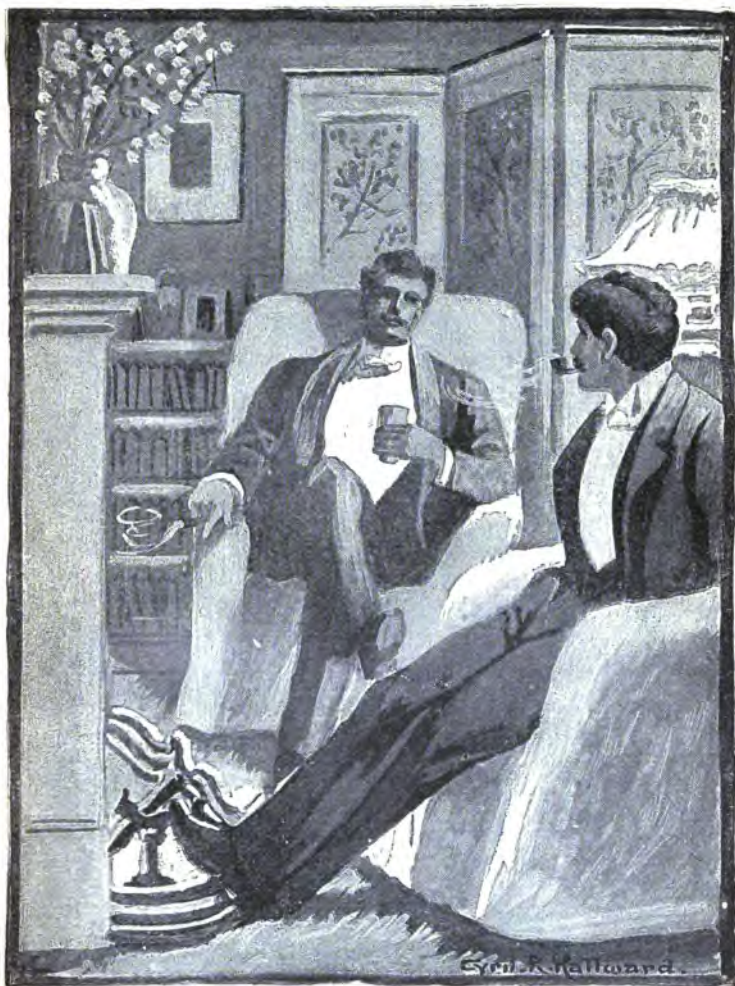
"'Tis an unprofitable argument," said I, with a sigh; "and there is much to be said on both sides. The best thing I can do is to set down this conversation, and let the coming race of authors judge for themselves. Well, and what else do you find fault with?"

"Your remarks about the critics."

"Ho! ho! so you are going to take the cudgels up on their behalf?"

"Not I!" retorted Eugene, shrugging his shoulders; "they are powerful enough to defend themselves. I simply wish to point out to you that if you say nasty things about the critics, they will certainly retaliate by saying nasty things about you."

"Let them! I certainly fail to see why I should



"MY GOOD FRIEND, 'TIS RIDICULOUS FOR THE LAMB TO ARGUE WITH THE WOLF."

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not give them my opinion. They don't mince matters with authors."

"Of course not! Why should they, kings of the Press as they are? You are making a mistake, Peter; all your criticism of critics sounds to me uncommonly like personal animus."

"I am sorry you should think me capable of such meanness. I have tried to show both sides of the question."

"There is only one side to the question in a case like this. You must not sit on a wasp's-nest, if you do not want to have a bad quarter of an hour."

"Why should I not give my opinion of critics? They have given theirs about me and the few works I have published."

"My good friend, 'tis ridiculous for the lamb to argue with the wolf. The critics have the Press on their side, and, through the newspapers, can give their opinions freely. You, on the contrary, will not be permitted to give your ideas on the subject of criticism, for they are sure to be unfriendly; and the Devil—I mean, the Press—looks after its own."

There was a good deal of truth in these remarks, as I well knew, for certainly 'tis unwise to cut off the nose to spite the face; and if the critics did not take my remarks about them in good part, I foresaw a storm in a teacup brewing for me and my work.

"Of course, Eugene, there are critics and critics," I said, after a pause. "I know many reviews are written by scholars and gentlemen—men of sound judgment and fine taste—but 'tis not to such I allude. 'Tis to the journalistic hack, who glances at a book and then crucifies the unfortunate author in the most

unjust manner. No author of any sense objects to have his faults pointed out in the severest fashion; but when a writer does his best to produce a good book, 'tis hard to have it made the subject of wholesale abuse. And the worst of it is that there is no appeal. The unfortunate authors have to sit still and be lashed, for if they dare to defend themselves they get it worse than ever. In fact, they cannot defend themselves; for the editors, who give the critics books to review, will not permit an author to defend himself in the papers."

"'Tis an unjust world, and virtue is only triumphant in theatrical performances," quoth Eugene, with a smile. "That remark is one of Gilbert's and contains much sound sense. At all events, Peter, I have warned you; and if your Bohemian sketches get abused, don't blame me for your folly. By the way, where did you pick up the style they are written in?"

"Oh, 'tis an echo of Heine, a reminiscence of Charles Lamb, a plagiarism from Murger, and an imitation of Sterne."

"Without his genius! Don't be angry, Peter; but, indeed, you are very bold to attempt such imitation. *Neque arcum Apollo tendit.*"

"Don't; you put me in mind of Halston!"

"Well, he is happy enough," said Eugene, knocking the ashes out of his pipe; "but think of those others we knew in old days. Little Hunchback, Rax, the Signor—dead, all dead!"

"Better that than Aaron with his broken heart."

"Broken for the sake of a dancer. Lord, how strange! And Lionel Amberton, in his colonial

exile; Mark Trevanna, heaven only knows where; Laura, in the Periage; Kitty, in the gutter. Alas, the ups and downs of human life!"

I made no answer, being busy with my own sad thoughts.

"Memory is an impartial goddess, Peter. With the sweet she ever gives us the bitter, and her laughter is at times stifled in tears. Still we have little to complain of, my friend. Fortune has been very good to us. Home, wife, children, a sufficiency of worldly goods. What more can the heart of man desire?"

There was silence for a few moments, and then Eugene prepared to say good-night. Parting at the head of the stairs in order to retire to our respective apartments, I made one remark about the matter which was uppermost in my mind:

"At all events, Eugene, the critics—if they are just—cannot be hard on me after the publication of our conversation to-night, with which I intend to end the book."

Eugene smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and shook my hand warmly:

"My boy, the critics will not read your last chapter."

This prophecy disgusted me, and I went to bed.

After all, there is a good deal in the fable of "The Old Man and his Ass." Try to please every one, and you end by pleasing no one; but march along bravely on your road, doing your work to the best of your ability, without thinking how it will appear to this one or that one, and you will be sure to have your admirers. Why, I understand that some peo-

ple actually admire Henry VIII., and he certainly did not go out of his way to make himself agreeable. Therefore, in spite of what Eugene says, I trust my sketches of Bohemianism will meet with a certain amount of approval. Certainly 'tis not all amiable sentiment, after the fashion of Sunday-school books, but 'tis true to Nature: and if I hold up the mirror to that goddess 'tis not my fault should she show a painful picture to be reflected. As to my critics, I may be hard on them, as Eugene says; but I certainly do not go the length of calling them "little reptiles," as did one Henry Fielding, who wrote "Tom Jones." Sir, or madam, I end with "Oh!"—for I end with *fico*, and that is all I give for the blame I am likely to incur in not sugar-coating my pills. This *fico* remark is taken from "Westward Ho!" therefore, ye fault-finders, as I acknowledge the theft, do not hasten to tell me I have been guilty of plagiarism. But why should I defend myself when as yet no one, either with pen or tongue, hath made an assault upon me? Certainly there is no reason; but one should always be prepared for possible enemies.

Nevertheless, with regard to Bohemia, I have told you all I know of that strange country; but if you doubt my stories, or deem them to be much after the style of Marco Polo when he described the dominions of Prester John, all I can say is, go and see for yourselves. Bohemia lies here, there, and everywhere; 'tis as ubiquitous as the ghost of Hamlet's father; therefore, you will have no difficulty in gaining an entry into this ill-defended kingdom. Write books, compose music, paint pictures, and you will have

earned your right to be a denizen therein; nay, I have known some who had no other qualification but that of poverty, yet they were of this glorious fraternity of vagabonds.

Yet, ye who are enamoured of a distant view of the country, I would earnestly beseech you to pause and consider ere you take staff and scrip to wend thither. We all know how in old romances the daring knight sees a magnificent castle on a mountain pinnacle, yet, when he climbs upward with painful labor, discovers 'tis but a pile of fantastic stones, and that the magician who would bar his way to the fair princess hath thrown a glamour over his eyes. 'Tis the same with Bohemia. Youth, the all-powerful magician, hath thrown a veil of magic 'twixt your eyes and the country of starving genius, whereby you see laurel wreaths, coffers of gold, admiring crowds, and a pleasant life—instead of the fireless grate, the aching heart, the pinch of poverty. No! believe me, sir, this country is not a desirable one. 'Tis to you, I speak, O youth, who are now penning stanzas when a legal document demands your care. Rhyme and reason! Not so, but rhyme and treason; for 'tis treason against your happiness to thus seize the shadow and let fall the substance. Let not the songs of the Muses enchant thine ears, for they have had as many victims as the far-famed sirens, who, at least were thus merciful that they slew ignorant sailors, but not men of intellect. Aye, the Muse's victims are many; and I could glibly run you off a list—such as Chatterton, Burns, Savage, Keats, Thompson, and many others. Oh, I know well that bookworms will tell you this one was slain by drink,

that one by consumption; but these were simply the means of death, and the real causes, I vow, are traceable to those piping ladies of Parnassus.

But, indeed, I speak to deaf ears, for not one of those whom I warn will pause in his pilgrimage toward Prague. "Others have failed," the brave young heart will cry, "but I will succeed." Well then, go forward, and God be with you! for indeed you need him in that bleak land which lures you onward by its deceptive seeming. Nay, fail or succeed as you will, for I know not how Fate may rule your destiny, you will in the end sing the same song, preach the same sermon, as I do now. Literature, with a certain income, is heaven; but literature with nothing but pen, ink, paper, and brains, is—the other place. Write your poem, your novel, your essay, to please yourself, and I know of no more delightful employment, nor, indeed, of a more lenient judge; but supply reading matter to the public in order to make money, and your pleasure at once turns to pain.

Well, I will say farewell, for doubtless you are wearied both of sermon and preacher; but that is only human nature, as the voice of wisdom is ever disregarded for the songs of the sirens. However, if you have a mind to tempt Fate and explore Darkest Bohemia for yourself, do so by all means, and when you come back regretting that you did not take my advice, I promise you I will not add to your misery by saying, "I told you so."

Also do I say farewell to ye, dear comrades of the past, whose lives were so sorrowful, whose hearts so true. Far and wide are ye scattered over this little

orange we call earth, and never will I see ye again. True, some remain, and those are friends whom the common poverty of those days grappled to my side with clasps of steel. Richard Halston, philosopher and friend, thou art happy, and thou too, Eugene Delamere, whom I love as a brother. But Mark, and Lionel, and Rax, where are they? Alas! I know not—they have vanished into the obscurity from whence I called up their spirits. And Little Hunchback too, whose grave is now green with grass and gay with flowers, beautiful and pure as the soul which was enshrined in the ugly casket of his body. All gone, all dead, all vanished. Friends of my youth, I, that have dreamed of the laurel wreath of a poet, will sing your requiem—nay, the rhymes are not mine, but Aaron's, and well I remember the music to which they were set by Reginald Franklin. The name! we will call it by the dear name of long ago:

THE MARSEILLES OF BOHEMIA.

Take courage, brave hearts, in your sorrows, for night ever yields unto day,
Grim fate may give pleasant to-morrows, and crown us with laurel and bay;
Close up in the ranks of your marching, the weary must lie as they fall;
For water though throats may be parching, yet let not such torture appal.
We starve, and we thirst, and we languish, and raggedly clad is our throng;
Yet careless of hardship and anguish, we bravely go marching along.
Parnassus shines fair in the distance, so why should we sink in despair,